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## The Sibling Relationship: Friendship or Rivalry?

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***The Sibling Relationship: Friendship or Rivalry?***

A thesis submitted to Dublin Institute of Technology in part fulfillment of the requirements for award of Masters (M.A.) in Child, Family and Community Studies

By

**Edel Wallace**

**September 2012**

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Dublin Institute of Technology**

### *Declaration*

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis towards award of the **Masters (M.A.) in Child, Family and Community Studies** is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part-fulfillment of the award named above.

*Signature of candidate:*.....

*Date:*.....

## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to examine the sibling relationship from the perspective of both siblings in order to add to the understanding of potentially one of the most important relationship of an individual's life. In particular, questions were asked about how the relationship is affected in terms of warmth, conflict and rivalry by a number of variables; gender, level of contact and number of siblings in the family. This study also sought to determine if there is a gender divide in the type of support provided between siblings.

A quantitative, self-completion questionnaire was used in order to conduct the survey which was returned by 133 respondents, of which 41 sibling pairs were identified, the responses of whom were compared. Data was analysed using SPSS. Findings were, to a large extent, consistent with previous research. Gender, contact and number of siblings were found to be correlated with the warmth of the relationship and the level of rivalry and conflict although a negative correlation was found between number of siblings and rivalry. Gender was also found to play a role in the amount of support provided between siblings, with sisters being most likely to provide both emotional and practical support. Sisters too appeared to have the most similar perception of their relationship when their answers were compared. This study recommended that in order to gain a greater insight into the sibling relationship further research might be undertaken to investigate if siblings who believe their parents treat them equally have an egalitarian relationship with each other, compared with those who feel one or both parents favour one sibling over the other. Additional research might also include more siblings in late adulthood in order to gain a greater understanding of how the relationship is experienced across the lifespan and, separately, a mixed method approach to the issue of perception of the relationship may provide useful in-depth data.

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# **1 INTRODUCTION**

Sibling relationships are unique in that they may be characterised by their durability, often being one of the longest lasting relationships in an individual's lifetime with siblings sharing background, experiences and family (White, 2001). It is suggested that the interaction between siblings may be influenced by their perception of the relationship (Stocker, Lanthier & Furman, 1997). But what makes one relationship a warm and supportive relationship while another one is conflictual and disharmonious? The relationship is not just influenced by the siblings themselves but may also be affected by other people, situations and circumstances (Furman & Lanthier, 1996; Stoneman & Brody, 1993). Even within the same family, one individual might get on better with one or more siblings than another.

The sibling relationship has, for the most part, been ignored by researchers until the 1980s (Dunn, 2002). It is often a complex relationship; for example for some individuals it can be a great source of friendship and support (Connidis & Davies, 1990; O'Bryant, 1988) but it can also be a source of rivalry, conflict or ambivalence (Allan, 1977; Bedford, 1998; Connidis, 2007).

The purpose of this study is to examine the sibling relationship in terms of warmth, conflict and rivalry, in particular questioning the effects of gender, family size and level of contact. In order to determine whether the relationship is perceived in similar ways by both members of the sibling dyad, a comparison will be made of their answers to questions designed to assess both siblings' perception of their behaviour and feelings towards each other (Stocker et al., 1997). The Researcher will use an existing questionnaire, the short form version of the Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire which had been developed for this purpose (Lanthier, Stocker & Furman, 2000).

## **1.1 Definition of Key Terms**

Sibling: "Siblings are those with whom one most closely shares genetic, family, social class and historical background and to

whom one is tied for a lifetime by a network of interlocking family relationships” (White, 2001, p555).

**Sibling Relationship:** Incorporates actions, verbal and nonverbal communications between individuals who share the same biological parents (Cicirelli, 1991)

**Kinship:** “Kinship is one of the main organising principles of human society...kinship systems establish relationships between individuals and groups on the model of biological relationships between parents and children, between siblings and between marital partners” (Scott & Marshall, 2005, p335).

**Lifespan:** The duration of the lifetime. Development over the lifespan is a life-long activity which is multidimensional and multidirectional and involves not only gains but also the management of losses (Sugarman, 2006).

**Gender:** Gender refers to the socially constructed aspects of differences between women and men (Giddens, 2006).

**Inner Circle:** Talcott Parsons (1943) proposed that families consist of an inner circle comprising father, mother, brother, sister, spouse, son and daughter (McEwan & Sutcliffe, 1965)

## **1.2 Research Questions**

*What Are The Effects Of Gender, Number Of Siblings And Level Of Contact On Warmth, Conflict And Rivalry In The Sibling Relationship?*

*Is The Type Of Support Provided Between Siblings Dependent On Gender?*

### **1.3 Aims and Objectives**

The aim of this study is to add to the current understanding of the sibling relationship. In particular, the question of whether or not siblings perceive the relationship in the same way will be examined by comparing the answers of sibling pairs to a 49 question survey.

### **1.4 Rationale for Research Study**

As will be discussed, the sibling relationship is unique as it is often the longest relationship experienced during one's lifetime, and it has the potential to be one of the most important relationships (Allan, 1977; Cicirelli, 1980; Lee, Mancini & Maxwell, 1990; Voorpostel, Van der Lippe, Dykstra, & Flap, 2007; White, 2001). It is unique in that siblings share experiences, history, genetics and background in a particular way that they cannot share with friends or wider family (White, 2001).

The Researcher herself has one sibling, with whom she believes she has a warm and supportive relationship, however, she is unaware if her sibling perceives the relationship in the same way. Separately, she is also aware of many people who have a more complicated and conflictual relationship with one or more of their siblings. As such, the Researcher was interested in determining how others felt about their relationship with the sibling closest in age to them. Respondents were therefore asked to include this sibling in the study, irrespective of whether they were closer to another sibling in order to get a true insight into sibling relationships, not just those that are perceived to be positive.

### **1.5 Outline of the Study**

For ease of understanding and clear presentation, this dissertation has been divided into separate chapters.

Chapter One: This chapter seeks to set out a brief introduction to the study and to outline a definition of key terms, research questions, aims, objectives and the rationale for the study.

Chapter Two: Chapter Two focuses on the existing literature relating to sibling relationships. It highlights areas such as the nature of the sibling relationship, the importance of attachment theory in terms of the sibling relationship, solidarity, contact, support, conflict and rivalry, gender, aging and well-being. While this research area was largely ignored until the 1980s, in recent years there has been a great deal of research into the sibling relationship, contributing to the existing literature, which will be discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Three: This chapter will outline the methodology used in the current study, explaining the rationale behind the choice of research design and instrument, how the sample was defined and participants were chosen before describing data collection and analysis procedures used and, finally, discussing the limitations and ethical considerations of this study.

Chapter Four: Chapter Four will present the findings of the questionnaire under the headings of the research questions, with tables and graphs where appropriate, before presenting a summary of the sibling dyads' responses.

Chapter Five: Chapter Five will discuss the findings of the study in greater detail and situate it in the context of previous research undertaken on this subject.

Chapter Six: This chapter will outline the conclusion of the study and provide recommendations for future research.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

It has been suggested that the sibling relationship is perhaps one of the most long-lasting and enduring relationships of an individual's life (Allan, 1977; Cicirelli, 1980; Lee, Mancini & Maxwell, 1990; Voorpostel et al., 2007; White, 2001). In recent years, research has focused on many aspects of sibling relationships from childhood through to old age with the importance of the sibling relationship being recognised as it can be a resource for support, solidarity, companionship and well-being (Allan, 1977; Bedford, 1995; Connidis & Davies, 1990; O'Bryant, 1988). However, sibling relationships can also be a source of rivalry, conflict and ambivalence (Allan, 1977; Bedford, 1998; Connidis, 2007).

The role of the sibling is a dynamic one which may change over the course of the lifespan from being playmate, caretaker, friend, and rival before becoming more egalitarian and an important source of support and solidarity (Cicirelli, 1994; Connidis, 2007; Voorpostel et al., 2007). Parsons (1943) suggested that kin relationships can be described as groups of "nested circles". During childhood siblings are generally to be found in the "inner circle" but this may change as they age with their life circumstances changing, causing them to move to the outer circles (White & Riedmann, 1992).

Although siblings may not see or speak to each other very often, they share important features such as background, family and genetics in a way that will ensure they are connected throughout their lives (Lamb, 1982; White, 2001).

### **2.2 The Nature of the Sibling Relationship**

In most industrialised societies siblings are understood to be individuals with two parents in common, with half-siblings sharing one parent, step-siblings and/or adoptive siblings being bound by legal bonds rather than genetics (Cicirelli, 1994). However, in some non-industrialised societies, the term sibling may be understood in very different ways; for example the Malo culture includes same-sex cousins, same sex aunts or uncles and same sex grandparents (Rubenstein, 1983) or the

Kenyan Giriama people, for whom siblings include all children of the tribe or village of the same age (Wenger, 1989).

Cicirelli (1994) points out the hierarchical aspect of the sibling structure which determines the individual's position in the hierarchy as a result of the number of siblings, order of birth, age, gender and age gaps. In the past it was believed that these variables affected children's personalities, motivation and intelligence and, as a result, affected their relationships with their siblings (Ernst & Angst, 1983; Sutton-Smith & Rosenberg, 1970). However, research carried out over the last 20 years has shown that other factors may affect the sibling relationship such as characteristics of the individual children, quality of other relationships within the family as well as difficulties or hardship which the family may face (Furman & Lanthier, 1996; Stoneman & Brody, 1993).

Dunn (2002) highlights what she refers to as three important characteristics of sibling relationships: 1) the intensity and expression of both positive and negative emotion during childhood and adolescence; 2) the intimacy of the relationship which is often a source of either conflict or support; and 3) these relationships vary according to the individual differences of the siblings with some showing positive feelings and affection, others showing hostility or aggression and yet others being ambivalent. Voorpostel and Blieszner (2008) found that the quality of the relationship between parents and siblings is important because the sibling relationship can be reinforced as a result of parental support and in the event that there was a poor relationship with one, a positive relationship with the other seemed to provide compensation.

Siblings very often spend more time together than with anyone else, particularly as children (Sanders, 2004). Sibling relationships can provide an early training ground for children to learn to develop relationships with peers, taking into account the other's perspectives and feelings and learning important skills such as anger management and conflict resolution (Brody, 2004). While children and adolescents may spend much of their time together, as adults, sibling contact becomes more voluntary as siblings take their relationship to a new level, one of friendship and support instead of obligation (Lee et al., 1990). The change in sibling contact may



be as a result of change in living arrangements as most siblings live together as children and often move away from home during emerging and young adulthood (Lee et al., 1990). Ross and Milgram (1982) found that siblings who are closer in age may share experiences and feel that they have more in common in adulthood. It should be noted that the relationship between spouses and their partner's siblings can affect the closeness of sibling relationship (Allan, 1977, Cicirelli, 1995).

### **2.3 Siblings and Attachment Theory**

Although Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991) were most concerned with the attachment bond between child and primary caregiver, Cicirelli (1996) applied attachment theory to sibling relationships as bonds are formed between children and other family members, including siblings (Ainsworth, 1991; Bank & Kahn, 1982). In adulthood, siblings can be seen as important attachment figures, particularly amongst single and childless siblings and in late adulthood (Doherty & Feeney, 2004).

The quality of children's interactions with their siblings has been found to be closely associated with their psychosocial adjustment, the nature of the relationship between parent and child, and the presence of parental stress (Updegraff, Thayer, Whiteman, Denning & McHale, 2005). Cicirelli (1995) proposes that whether a sibling relationship is positive or negative may be due to the type of attachment between the siblings, with insecure or disturbed attachments being at the root of violence in the relationship whereas a secure attachment may lead to siblings sharing a supportive relationship.

Dunn (2002) also suggests that it is not only the attachment of the siblings which is an important influence on the sibling relationship, but the attachment of the siblings to their parents, with evidence existing that there is a correlation between the security of young children's attachments to their parents and the quality of the sibling relationships in later years. However, Bank and Kahn (1982) point out that positive sibling relationships can be found in families with poor parent-child relationships which may occur as a result of the sibling relationship being seen as a

compensation (Dunn, 2002). As will be discussed later, Cicirelli (1991) found that social support and help are provided in order to protect the sibling bond.

The quality of the relationship between siblings in childhood has been shown to influence the relationship in adulthood as a deep emotional bond is unlikely to emerge in adulthood if it was not present in childhood (Connidis, 1989) and those that are largely harmonious in childhood are likely to remain so in adulthood (Kennedy & Kramer, 2008). Similarly, in a study of adult male siblings, most reported that the relationship had remained the same since childhood, although it was reported that some felt closer while others felt less close (Matthews, Delaney & Adamek, 1989).

In adulthood, siblings can maintain their emotional ties through spending time, communicating by telephone or correspondence and visiting with each other because of their affection for, and identification, with each other (Cicirelli, 1991). Through their sibling relationships, adults may feel a sense of attachment to another individual and find the relationship to be a source of reassurance of self-worth and alliance (Avioli, 1989). Attachment between adults exists as long as there is a need to maintain contact or to live near the sibling; one experiences grief following the death of a sibling; and the sibling relationship produces feelings of comfort and security (Cicirelli, 1996).

## **2.4 Sibling Solidarity and Contact**

As mentioned previously, a unique characteristic of the sibling relationship is its endurance and longevity (Allan, 1977), in some cases lasting 60 or 70 years (White, 2001). Sibling solidarity is not universal, and although it can exist in many industrialised societies, children are socialised to become independent, learning from an early age that they will one day leave home and their family, which may affect the occurrence and level of solidarity felt between siblings (Cicirelli, 1994).

In general, adult siblings usually live separately and have a volitional relationship seeing each other from time to time (Cicirelli, 1994). It is suggested that the siblings' perception of their relationship may influence their interaction (Stocker et

al., 1997). Allan (1977) concludes that once siblings leave home, their parents are often instrumental in instigating sibling interaction by inviting everyone to their home and by keeping each up to date on the other's news. While it is possible for one to maintain the sibling relationship by choosing the amount of interaction and activity required for this purpose (Allan, 1977), the average adult is thought to have some contact with a sibling once or twice a month for 60 or 70 years after leaving home (White & Riedmann, 1992).

Allan (1977) found that the majority of respondents tended to visit one another's homes or met at their parents' homes for special occasions rather than socialising with each other as they would with friends. For them, maintaining the relationship was the main purpose of the interaction. Working class respondents, however, tended to have a very strong relationship with at least one sibling so that they engaged in more social activities together, thereby placing greater emphasis on enjoyment rather than purely maintenance of the sibling relationship. The closeness of the relationship between siblings is likely to determine how often they interact (Cicirelli, 1985; Gold, 1989a). Most siblings maintain their sibling relationship through a combination of affection and obligation (Lee et al., 1990), although the sense of obligation is lower than reported for parents or children (White, 2001). Research shows that those siblings who feel they have more in common, are more likely to spend time together (Connidis, 2007).

Lee et al., (1990) found that the number of siblings an individual had was negatively correlated with frequency of contact and discretionary motivation, although this differs from the earlier finding of Schvaneveldt and Ihinger's (1979) which found that the more siblings an individual had, the more sibling solidarity existed. It is suggested that this may be because the number of resources available may decrease as the number of siblings increases (Lee et al., 1990).

## **2.5 Sibling Support**

Sibling support can be found from early childhood, with older siblings attempting to shield or buffer their younger siblings from the effects of negative family situations

which may result in fewer behaviour or emotional issues in the younger siblings (Brody, 2004).

Avioli (1989) describes two types of support in sibling relationships which can be provided; instrumental and expressive, and each fulfils different needs. Instrumental support requires close proximity as it involves practical help whereas expressive support such as offering advice and sharing problems can be provided whether the siblings live near each other or not (Avioli, 1989). In fact, Voorpostel and Van der Lippe (2007) found that emotional support exchange increases with greater distance because when siblings live further apart, they show more interest in each other's lives and their contact may be interpreted as supportive whereas siblings who live closer may show less interest and their contact may be more instrumental. Cicirelli (1991) found that siblings are more likely to provide expressive or psychological support than instrumental support, particularly as they get older (Gold, 1989b).

It is not thought that similarity is a particularly important factor in terms of sibling support apart from similar characteristics such as whether or not they have children and gender, with childless and same-sex siblings, especially sisters, tending to be more involved in each other's lives (Lee et al., 1990; Voorpostel et al., 2007). Lee et al. (1990) propose that individuals with children still living at home may feel less obligated towards their siblings as it may be felt that their parental role takes precedence over their role as sibling. However, White (2001) found that the presence of children may increase sibling contact, perhaps so that their children develop a good relationship with the wider family. Similarly, Connidis (1992) reports that following the creation of family subsystems when siblings get married, the arrival of children means an increase in sibling involvement with emotional closeness and supportiveness reported. However, it is not clear if this is the case when one or both siblings have children.

A difference can be found in the levels of emotional support exchanged between friends and siblings, with more emotional support being exchanged in friendships (Campbell, Connidis & Davies, 1999; McGlone, Park & Roberts, 1999), and, as will be discussed in more detail later, with sisters found to provide more emotional support to their siblings than brothers (Cicirelli, 1991; White & Riedmann, 1992).

Voorpostel and Van der Lippe (2007) found that the sibling relationship needs maintenance in order for the provision of support. The sibling relationship cannot be thought of as an inactive source of support, waiting to be called upon in times of crisis and a certain amount of contact is required in order to maintain the relationship (Voorpostel & Van der Lippe, 2007).

Research shows that adult siblings, particularly those in late adulthood, rely on each other, especially in times of crisis (Cicirelli, 1996), although they are also often there to support their sibling during positive life events (Moyer, 1992). Studies have found that parental support may create an atmosphere in the family highlighting the importance of helping each other which lasts into adulthood (Voorpostel & Blieszner, 2008).

## **2.6 Conflict and Rivalry**

It is believed that the individualistic nature of Western society breeds competition between siblings (Bedford, 1996), which may lead to rivalry and negative feelings (Cicirelli, 1995) and is further exacerbated by the fact that the sibling relationship is not seen as a voluntary one (Bedford, 1998). As discussed earlier, the intensity of the sibling relationship can result in conflict as well as support (Dunn, 2002). Social learning theory proposes that high levels of conflict and rivalry in a sibling relationship have the potential to result in adjustment problems (Bandura, 1977).

Research carried out by Stocker et al., (1997) shows that the number of children in a family is positively correlated with rivalry and negatively correlated with warmth, which, they suggest, may be due to the fact that children of larger families may have experienced limited resources in terms of love and attention, thereby increasing their rivalry and reducing the warmth between siblings.

Younger siblings may find that they are unfairly compared with the behaviour of their older sibling by both their parents and their teachers so that they are subject to unrealistic expectations of either good or bad behaviour (Whiteman & Buchanan, 2002). Brody (2004) acknowledges that children view their parents' behaviour and treatment of a sibling as a barometer by which they can assess how much they are

loved, rejected, included or excluded and their perception of their parents' differential behaviour may compromise the sibling relationship (Kowel & Kramer, 1997). As mentioned earlier those sibling relationships which are mainly hostile in childhood and adolescence generally remain so throughout adulthood (Kennedy & Kramer, 2008).

The amount of conflict in the sibling relationship may be determined by the personality and temperamental characteristics of the siblings (Dunn, 2002). Research shows that individuals who grow up with aggressive older siblings are themselves at risk of negative outcomes such as poor performance in school, in relationships with peers and of developing behavioural issues (Bank, Patterson, & Reid, 1996). Crick, Nelson, Morales, Cullerton-Sen, Casas & Hickman (2001) propose that siblings are more likely to use relational aggression than verbal or physical aggression. Research by Updegraff et al. (2005) shows that relational aggression between siblings is correlated to greater negativity and lower emotional support in the relationship. It is suggested that individual adjustment may be affected by relational aggression in the sibling relationship as indirect and manipulative methods are used which may result in isolation of one sibling and lead to limited access to appropriate peer relationships (Soli, McHale & Feinberg, 2009).

Outcomes of sibling conflicts can be temporary, permanent, constructive or destructive depending on the success of discussion, negotiation and resolution. Where conflicts result in a constructive outcome, both parties may experience improvement in their relationship and the acquisitions of conflict resolution skills. However, conflicts which remain unresolved or where solutions are imposed on both parties are destructive outcomes and have potential to flare up in the future (Cicirelli, 1995).

While acknowledging that issues about parental favouritism may continue into adulthood because of the importance and strength of family bonds, it is suggested that conflict between siblings may diminish in adulthood when the siblings no longer live together, instead being able to choose how much time to spend together (Stocker et al., 1997).

Ross and Milgram (1982) found that 45% of 22 to 93 year olds reported feeling rivalry towards their sibling; however, in contrast Cicirelli (1982) reported that 88% of middle aged respondents rarely or never argued with a sibling and Gold (1989c) found that just 10% of elderly siblings fit a hostile typology. While it may be acceptable to disassociate oneself from a similarly discordant friendship, when ties between siblings are severed it may prove more problematic as there are certain cultural expectations that siblings' blood ties go deeper than the bonds of friendship (Allan, 1977).

## **2.7 Gender**

Gender has been found to be an important factor in the closeness of the sibling relationship, with sisters being closest, followed by cross-sex siblings and finally, brothers (Cicirelli, 1994; Dunn, 2002; Lee et al., 1990). One suggested reason for this finding is that women are socialised to become nurturers and to express themselves emotionally (Dunn, 2002) which may also be the reason that research finds sisters to be more helpful than brothers (Block 1984; Jacklin & Reynolds, 1993). Although Voorpostel et al. (2007) found that the type of support required may be important, as men are more likely provide to provide practical support whereas women are more likely to provide emotional support.

As discussed earlier, having a sister may lead to increased life satisfaction (McGhee, 1985) but it is also true that sisterly relationships may be fraught with tension (Bedford, 1989; Downing 1988). Research shows that because same-sex siblings share characteristics, they are easily compared which may lead to increased competition, although some individuals consciously try to create their own identity by becoming the opposite of their sibling (Bedford, 1996).

In a study of male siblings, Matthews et al., (1989) found that almost half of the brother dyads only saw each other once or twice a year but those who saw each other more often, also kept in regular telephone contact. In many cases it was reported that individuals felt a close connection with their brothers as they felt understood and shared important values or beliefs. This corresponds with findings by Avioli (1989) that solidarity is greater amongst family members who share

values and understand each other (Avioli, 1989) and that perceived emotional closeness is a factor in maintenance of contact (Lee et al., 1990)

## **2.8 Aging**

As adults grow older, they may find that their sibling relationship becomes more important (Parsons, 1943). As discussed, it is often a time when siblings rely on each other for support and companionship (Cicirelli, 1991). It is also suggested that this is a time when siblings who were not close may find a way to reconcile their differences and unite, perhaps in the face of the death of a parent (Mack, 2004; Moyer, 1992). However, it is also possible that this is a time when old conflicts and rivalries re-emerge (Mack, 2004).

The sibling relationship has been found to be particularly important in late adulthood as a source of friendship and solidarity (Allan, 1977; Connidis, 1989). Support in the form of having someone to reminisce with and share past experiences with has been found to be important (Avioli, 1989; Cicirelli, 1988), and many adult siblings expressed the wish that they could live in closer proximity to their siblings (Gold, 1987; McGhee, 1985; O'Bryant, 1988).

White (2001) found that the majority of sibling relationships, when analysed over the adult lifespan, involve less contact and exchange but this is balanced with stability, particularly in mid to late adulthood where the level of support increases once more.

## **2.9 Sibling Well-being**

Well-being is a complex, multidimensional concept, referring to an individual's welfare, happiness and social relations as well as to their wealth or health. It can be both subjective and objective and can be used to describe how an individual perceives his life (Wollny, Apps & Henricson, 2010).

There is some inconsistency in the literature about the effects of siblings on well-being of adults. While frequency of sibling interaction is not believed to be related



to well-being (Lee & Ihinger-Tallman, 1980), McGhee (1985) found a correlation between life satisfaction and having a female sibling. Similarly, a positive effect was found between widows who had more contact with their sisters than those who had less (O'Bryant, 1988). Research has found that physical proximity (McGhee, 1985); perceived closeness (Cicirelli, 1989) and quality of the sibling relationship (Wilson, Calsyn & Orlofsky, 1994) were related to well-being. Bank and Kahn (1982) point out that although contact may be minimal for periods of the lifespan, latent feelings of love and warmth may exist and be rekindled. However, it is also the case that old rivalries and hostilities may be reignited when siblings have to spend extended time together (Allan, 1977) because, as discussed earlier, due to the strength of family bonds, old rivalries can persist into adulthood (Stocker et al., 1997).

Research shows that poor relationships can have an adverse effect on well-being (Antonucci, 1994). However, Bedford (1998) found that in terms of positive effect, sibling relationships may contribute to well-being, particularly when positive reappraisal of sibling difficulties occurs in adulthood as the individual may credit the early conflict in their sibling relationship with teaching conflict resolution strategies or perhaps the competitiveness of the relationship pushing them to do their best.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

As discussed, the sibling relationship is unique in its longevity and importance (Allan, 1977; Cicirelli, 1980; Lee et al., 1990; Voorpostel et al., 2007; White, 2001). White and Riedmann (1992) suggest that the sibling relationship may lose importance during the early and middle adulthood years as the individuals' circumstances change before, perhaps, once again regaining importance in late adulthood. However, it is possible that at certain times or following certain events, such as the death of parents or a spouse, the sibling may return once again to importance (Van Volkom, 2006). While it has been suggested (Cantor, 1979) that, in such an instance, the reason for the sibling's return to the inner circle of importance is to take the place of the lost person, it has been found that siblings do not remain dormant during the good times, waiting in the background in order to act

as a replacement for the loss of preferred members of the inner circle (Voorpostel & Van der Lippe, 2007; White, 2001).

The levels of support, solidarity, contact, conflict and rivalry found amongst siblings have been shown to vary from one relationship to the next and within the relationship it can vary across the lifespan. It was felt that following previous research carried out by Stocker et al. (1997), the factors of warmth, conflict and rivalry should be examined in greater detail in order to attempt to understand the sibling relationship.

Studies suggest that the type of support provided by siblings was divided along gender lines, with women being more likely to provide emotional support and men providing practical support (Voorpostel et al., 2007). This question was explored in greater detail in this study.

There was some inconsistency in the literature about the levels of rivalry and conflict between siblings (Gold, 1989a; Ross and Milgram, 1982). It was felt that the question of whether sibling rivalry diminishes in adulthood would benefit from further investigation, in particular examining the effect of gender on the presence of rivalry.

While the nuclear family is still important in Ireland, and divorce remains relatively low compared with other European countries, the traditional image of the family is beginning to change as step families become more prevalent and, increasingly, individuals postpone starting a family until their 30s (Fahey & Field, 2008). Against this backdrop of the changing face of the Irish family, and building on the research reviewed in this chapter, the present study sought to investigate the sibling relationship, particularly taking into account the perspectives of both members of the sibling dyad. In particular, it focused on the areas of contact, warmth, conflict, gender, rivalry, number of siblings in a family, and the type of support provided between siblings.

### **3 METHODOLOGY SECTION**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will give an overview of the method, research design and sample. Ethical considerations will be discussed, together with a description of how the data analysis was carried out and an outline of the limitations of this study.

The main objective of this study was to examine the relationships between siblings in order to contribute to the current understanding of this relationship. It was believed that the literature would benefit from further research on the perceived level of intimacy, emotional support, antagonism, dominance and rivalry within the relationship, particularly from the perspective of both siblings.

#### **3.2 Design**

When undertaking a study, researchers must choose whether to use quantitative or qualitative research, or a combination of the two. In brief, the difference between the two methodologies is that quantitative research usually involves the testing of theories or hypotheses, measuring the collection and analysis of data whereas qualitative research is dynamic, subject-centred, empathetic and provides in-depth data (Sarantakos, 2005). The research strategies available are experimental, survey, archival analysis, historical and case study or, in some cases, a combination of more than one of these. When deciding on the type of strategy to undertake, researchers must decide if they require control over behaviour or proceedings or if they will be focusing on contemporary events (Walliman, 2011a). It was felt that in this instance a survey approach would provide data which could be compared, both within the sibling dyad and across the population.

Using a survey strategy has been found to be useful in research of this kind, allowing for a wide coverage of respondents at a particular point in time using empirical research (Denscombe, 2007). It enables researchers to collect the same information from each respondent across the sample, systematically addressing the questions in which the Researcher is interested, and allowing for standardised

collection of data (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2006). Through their use of standardised questions, surveys facilitate comparability between respondents and, if required, particular groups of respondents, for example by age or gender (Muijs, 2011). It is arguably the best method employed in the gathering of data on perceptions and experiences (Guthrie, 2010), however, critics of this approach suggest that it offers insufficient insight as respondents are often not given an opportunity to give in-depth answers (McNeill & Chapman, 2005). On balance, it was felt that it would enable the Researcher to gain access to the greatest number of participants (Muijs, 2011).

When deciding which survey method to implement, researchers must determine the type of information being sought and whether the research will examine certain issues in detail or if a standardised comparison of replies is sought. The options available are cross-sectional survey, census, longitudinal approach or a lengthy case study (Guthrie, 2010). Blaxter et al. (2006) address the advantages and disadvantages of surveys being that they are relatively easy, cheap to administer with a fast turn around in responses. When using an appropriate sample, they can be generalisable to the wider population which can be useful for large-scale research and because they are systematic and standardised, they can be replicated by other researchers. Their disadvantages are that while they focus on a particular point in time, they do not explain underlying causes; it is easy to focus on the data rather than to examine wider issues; if the respondents have queries or comments, the researcher is often not at hand to address these, thus raising questions as to the accuracy of replies.

In the present study, it was decided to use a cross-sectional survey due to time constraints. Having decided on a survey approach, the type of available survey tools was then addressed such as whether to use postal, internet questionnaires, face to face interviews, telephone interviews, documents or observation (Guthrie, 2010).

### **3.3 Research Instrument**

Questionnaires are research tools, which, because of their consistency and precision, can be used in the collection and analysis of data (Denscombe, 2007).

Taking into account factors such as how this topic has been dealt with in the literature, the issues of time and access to samples which were available to the Researcher and the type of data which can be accessed through each method, it was decided to make use of a questionnaire which would enable the Researcher to survey a much larger sample than would be possible through the use of interviews.

When deciding whether to use postal or online questionnaires, the Researcher evaluated the advantages and disadvantages of each. For example, while postal questionnaires are inexpensive and can be delivered to a large number of people (McNeill & Chapman, 2005), they are more expensive to administer than an online questionnaire, stamped addressed envelopes must be provided together with an envelope for the target participant to forward the questionnaire to their sibling. In addition, this may be seen as being more cumbersome than simply having to forward a link to one's sibling. Internet questionnaires have been found to be a fast and cheap way of collecting data (Denscombe, 2007).

A self-administered online questionnaire known as the short form version of the Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire ("ASRQ-S") (Lanthier et al., 2000) was employed for the collection of data (See Appendix 3). The ASRQ-S is concerned with the respondents' perception of their own behaviour and feelings towards their sibling and their siblings' behaviour and feelings towards them (Riggio, 2000). The ASRQ-S makes use of Likert scales which can be used in questionnaires in order to compare strength of feeling or perception (McNeill & Chapman, 2005).

The first page of the questionnaire is a demographic sheet designed to ascertain details such as gender, age and family information such as number of siblings and position in family. Respondents were also asked to enter their mother's maiden name so that sibling dyads could be identified and their replies compared with each other.

The ASRQ-S consists of 47 items which are spread over eight scales designed to investigate three factors; Warmth, Conflict and Rivalry. Warmth consists of three scales: Intimacy, Emotional Support and Knowledge. Conflict also consists of three scales: Quarrelling, Antagonism and Dominance. By using a weighting of

items for each of these scales, responses are scored on either a 3 or 4 point scale ranging from 1 to 3 or 1 to 4. Rivalry is made up of Maternal and Paternal Rivalry and these scales were scored as “the absolute value of deviations from the mid-point of the scale” (Lanthier et al., 2000). Scores ranged from 0 – 2, 0 indicating absence of rivalry and 2 indicating maximum rivalry.

The Researcher added two further questions to the Emotional Support scale in order to determine the type of support provided by siblings; Question 26: When you are stressed is this sibling more likely to provide emotional or practical support? and Question 27: When your sibling is stressed are you more likely to provide emotional or practical support? The possible options for both questions were Emotional Support, Practical Support, Both, Neither. Table xx below sets out the items in the ASRQ-S together with their corresponding scales and factors.

**Table 1 ASRQ-S Items, Scales and Factors**

<b>Scale</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Factor</b>
Intimacy	1, 2, 16, 17, 34, 35	Warmth
Quarrelling	3, 18, 19, 36, 37	Conflict
Antagonism	4, 5, 20, 21, 38, 39	Conflict
Maternal Rivalry	6, 7, 22, 23, 40, 41	Rivalry
Emotional Support	8, 9, 24, 25, 26, 27 42, 43	Warmth
Dominance	10, 11, 28, 29, 44, 45	Conflict
Paternal Rivalry	12, 13, 30, 31, 46, 47	Rivalry
Knowledge	14, 15, 32, 33, 48, 49	Warmth

Test-retest correlations in the original ASRQ were found to be statistically reliable (Stocker et al., 1997). The ASRQ-S has been shown to correlate highly with the original ASRQ ( $r = .95$  for Warmth and  $r = .97$  for Conflict) and the ASRQ-S has been found to be internally consistent ( $\alpha = .96$  for Warmth,  $\alpha = .93$  for Conflict and  $\alpha = .91$  for Rivalry) (Lanthier et al., 2000). Punch (2005) suggests that use of a pre-existing measuring instrument, such as the ASRQ-S, is recommended particularly

in cases where the variable is complex, in order to compare findings with existing studies and because the more an instrument is used, the more is learned about its properties.

### **3.4 Sample**

In order to obtain a suitable sample it was decided to use purposive sampling as it allowed the Researcher to send the questionnaire to target participants who were known to her, meaning anyone aged 18 years or older with a sibling also aged over 18 years. In each case the Researcher approached individuals and asked them to recruit their sibling (hereafter the respondent who was targeted by the Researcher, or recruited on her behalf, shall be called the “target respondent” while their sibling will be called “the sibling”). In the event that the target respondent had more than one sibling, they were asked to pick the sibling closest in age to them, irrespective of whether they were emotionally closer to another sibling. Thereafter, the Researcher employed snowball sampling by asking the target respondent to forward the email containing the link to the questionnaire to any individuals they knew who also met the criteria and who might be interested in taking part in this research with their own siblings. As the Researcher is based in Dublin, it is likely that the majority of target respondents were also living in Dublin.

As discussed, while surveys can be generalisable to the wider population when an appropriate sample is used, the Researcher recognised that the use of non-probability sampling in this study reduced the generalisability of the research as it was not the case that each member of the population stood the same chance of being included in the sample (Denscombe, 2007).

#### *Sample 1*

Using a purposive sampling approach, post-graduate students studying for a Masters in Child, Family and Community Studies in Dublin Institute of Technology were contacted by e-mail and invited to participate in the research. A link to the questionnaire was included on the e-mail. Upon completion of the questionnaire,

participants were asked to forward the e-mail containing the link to the questionnaire to the sibling closest in age to them.

### *Sample 2*

As it was thought that the majority of participants in Sample 1 would be young adults, thereby excluding middle adulthood individuals, the Researcher subsequently used purposive sampling to send the questionnaire on to all contacts in her personal e-mail account who she knew had siblings.

### *Sample 3*

Again, purposive sampling was employed to identify suitable participants in late adulthood. Prospective participants were approached by the Researcher or were contacted through participants of Sample 1 and 2 and asked if they and a sibling would consent to participate. As this sample was thought to be the least likely to have access to the internet, older adults were offered a choice of filling in the questionnaire online or, if preferable, hard copies of the questionnaire were distributed. Participants who received a hard copy of the questionnaire received a second copy of the questionnaire, two stamp-addressed envelopes so that each sibling could return the completed forms and one blank stamped envelope so that the first sibling could forward the questionnaire to their sibling.

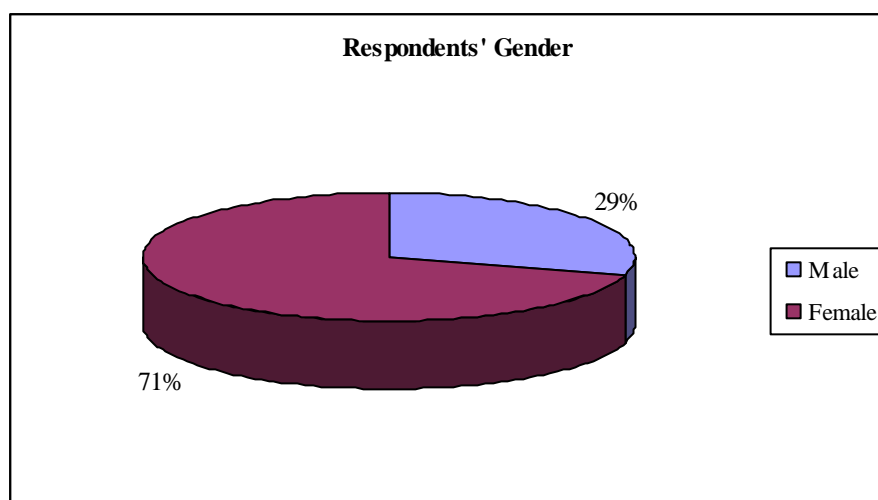
Again, in addition to each participant involving their sibling in the study, each was also asked to nominate other possible participants who were subsequently approached so that a representative sample of older adults could be included in the present research.

80 online questionnaires and 10 hard copy questionnaires were distributed with 133 responses being received, of which 41 sibling dyads were identified. A gender balance was maintained at the distribution stage with emails sent to 40 male and 40 female potential participants. Similarly, hard copies were distributed evenly between male and female targeted participants.



When carrying out research, it is suggested that the higher the response rate, the lower the chance of achieving a significant response bias. Response rates of over 70% are regarded as very good, with over 60% being good and over 50% being adequate (Rubin & Babbie, 2010).

133 respondents completed the questionnaire within the allotted timeframe of one month. As can be seen from Figure 1 below, almost twice as many female participants responded, with a response rate of 71% female and 29% male respondents.



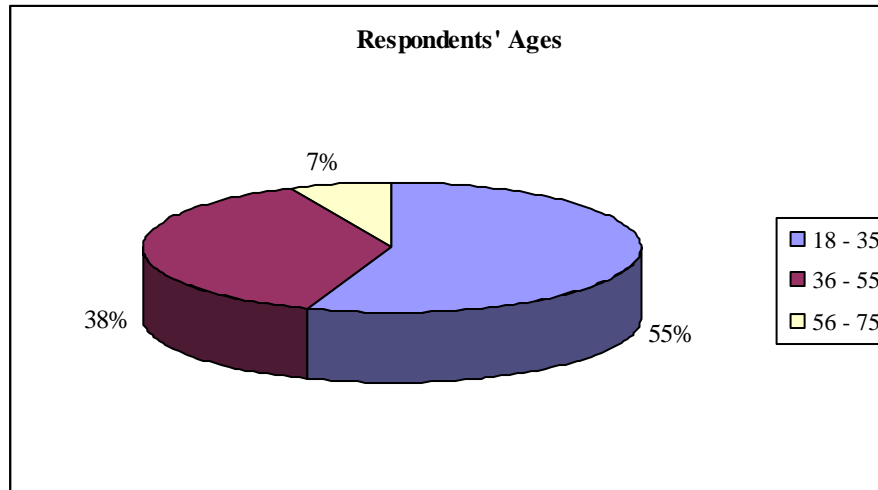
**Figure 1 Gender of Respondents**

Of these, 27 males completed the questionnaire about their brother, with only 12 completing it about their sister. Conversely, only 19 females completed the questionnaire about their brother, while 75 completed it about their sister, showing that target respondents tended to recruit same-sex siblings.

The figures highlighted in this section would suggest that while a greater number of female target participants responded and recruited their sibling to respond, they also recruited other female participants together with their siblings to respond.

The average age of participants was 36.05 for target respondent and 36.49 for siblings, with standard deviations of 10.168 and 10.203 respectively, covering a range of 21 to 69 for target respondent and 21 to 67 for siblings. The age of

respondents can be seen in Figure 2 below with the majority falling into the 18 – 35 age group.



**Figure 2 Age of Respondents**

Target respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire about the sibling closest in age to them and the majority appeared to comply with this stipulation. As can be seen from the table below, the majority of respondents were first and second born siblings and they completed it about each other.

**Table 2 Respondents' Birth Order Cross-tabulation**

Respondents' Birth Order	Sibling's Birth order					Total
	First Born	Second Born	Third Born	Fourth Born	Later Born	
First Born	0	26	7	3	0	36
Second Born	25	0	4	4	0	33
Third Born	9	8	0	7	0	24
Fourth Born	3	5	9	0	7	24
Later Born	1	1	1	4	9	16
Total	38	40	21	18	16	133

### **3.5 Data Collection**

As research has shown that the response rate for both postal and online questionnaires increases when advance contact is made and personalised messages are included (Dillman, 2007), it was decided that a covering e-mail would be sent to target respondents wherein the Researcher introduced herself and briefly explained the nature of the research which was being undertaken, assuring possible respondents of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses (see Appendix 1). While e-mail addresses are not as widely available as postal addresses, it is possible to make use of ready-made group e-mail address (Denscombe, 2007) and the Researcher used the e-mail addresses of the class of the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) Masters in Child, Family and Community Studies 2012 to recruit participants together with personal contacts in her personal e-mail account.

By filling out a questionnaire online which had been designed and constructed in Google Drive, and subsequently forwarding the link to the questionnaire to the sibling closest in age to them, participants were encouraged to be as open and honest as possible about the current status of their sibling relationship, understanding that only the Researcher would see the completed questionnaires.

In order to gather relevant data, questionnaires were sent to sibling dyads, allowing the Researcher to compare both siblings' perceptions of various aspects of their relationship. Instructions were given at the beginning of the questionnaire to ensure participants understood that it was interested only in the sibling relationship at that particular point in time and not in the siblings' past relationship or their likely future relationship (Lanthier et al., 2000)

A pilot study was undertaken on 15 June 2012 with two questionnaires sent to possible participants in each of the sample groups, thereby totalling six questionnaires, with an expected response rate of 12 questionnaires. A 100% response rate was achieved, with participants reporting no difficulty with the length or content of the questionnaire.

Data collection took place between 29 June and 27 July 2012. Emails containing the link to the questionnaire were sent to 80 possible participants in the first two samples. Follow up e-mails were sent 10 days after the initial e-mail was sent out reminding everyone that not only was their response required but also that of their siblings. A final reminder was sent 10 days later. As was anticipated by (Dillman, 2007), sending reminder e-mails resulted in an increase in the number of responses, particularly amongst siblings of those who had already completed the questionnaire.

Hard copies of the questionnaire together with a cover letter (see Appendix 1) were handed to 10 possible participants in Sample 3. Each of these also received a second copy of the questionnaire with a slightly different cover letter (see Appendix 2) together with 2 stamped self-addressed envelopes and a stamped envelope should they need to post the questionnaire and cover letter to their sibling. Participants in Sample 3 were offered the option of filling out the questionnaire online and the link was provided to them.

Through the use of a pre-published questionnaire, its ability to be easily understood and instructions followed had been tested. The authors of the questionnaire made use of closed questions, meaning that answers were limited and results could be easily compared with the aid of software, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (“SPSS”) (Guthrie, 2010). One of the concerns with the use of online questionnaires is that if instructions are not clear, the participant cannot ask the Researcher for clarification or further instructions. However, feedback received from a number of those who completed the questionnaire at the pilot stage was that it was easy to follow and they found it very interesting, although others remarked on the apparent similarity of some of the questions. All feedback noted how little time it took to complete.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

Having utilised an online questionnaire, data was returned in a spreadsheet format in Google Drive, making the process of input of data into the computer package SPSS relatively straightforward once all the responses had been received. SPSS version 17 was employed in the analysis. Descriptive statistics were run to

establish the number of respondents, the number of complete sibling dyads, the number of participants who completed the questionnaire about their brother or sister, and whether it was about an older or younger sibling. Means and standard deviations were calculated based on gender and the level of contact between siblings and average age of participants were also analysed and findings will be discussed below.

Thereafter, the Researcher tested each of the research questions. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationship between contact and warmth, number of siblings and warmth, number of siblings and rivalry and contact and rivalry. ANOVA tests were conducted to assess the relationship between gender and warmth, and gender and conflict. An independent t-test was carried out to establish a link between gender and rivalry.

In order to compare the siblings' responses, the responses of the 41 complete dyads were input into an Excel spreadsheet. Only one of the questions could be directly compared with the sibling's answer; Question 3: How much do you and this sibling argue with each other? (Lanthier et al., 2000). The remaining 48 questions were paired so that one question asked about the respondent's perception and the next asked about their sibling's perception on different things, for example Question 1: How much do you talk to this sibling about things that are important to you? and Question 2: How much does this sibling talk to you about things that are important to him or her? (Lanthier et al., 2000). For these 48 questions Question 1 of the target respondents' responses were compared with Question 2 of their siblings and vice versa. For example with Question 1 respondents who are in tune with each other would be expected to say how often they talk to their sibling about things which are important to them, whether it is never, rarely, occasionally or regularly and their sibling would be expected to confirm this in their answer to Question 2. In cases where such confirmation was provided, it was taken that the siblings' perception of their relationship is accurate on that point.

### **3.7 Limitations**

There are a number of limitations to this study, for example the limited time and resources available to the Researcher meant that only 90 possible respondents were approached to become involved. As discussed, while it has been found that questionnaires can be a useful way of measuring respondents' perceptions and attitudes (Guthrie, 2010), it is believed that self-report questionnaires may not be as reliable in gathering information on respondent behaviours (Muijs, 2011).

Probability sampling has been found to be more reliable than non-probability sampling as it is thought that the sample chosen will be representative of the population as a whole (Bernard, 2000). Through the use of non-probability sampling, the Researcher recognised the generalisability of the research was reduced, but felt that in order to include a wide range of respondent ages, non-probability samples would have to be employed.

The use of closed questions meant that respondents' answers could not be investigated in depth and, in fact, their answers may have been limited. However, it was felt that the advantages to using this approach outweighed the disadvantages as there can be a loss of comparability and standardisation with the use of open questions (McNeill & Chapman, 2005).

Through the use of Likert scales, data collected were measured on ordinal scales which have been found to limit statistical analysis, in that it is impossible to say for certain that the distance between "Hardly at all" and "A little" is the same as between "Quite a Lot" and "A Lot".

It is purported that both online and postal self-report questionnaires may result in a low response rate (Walliman, 2011b). In order to offset this, an e-mail detailing the type of research which was being undertaken and assuring possible respondents of confidentiality and anonymity was included. In addition, 10 days after sending out the questionnaires by e-mail, the Researcher sent a reminder e-mail to all possible respondents requesting a prompt response if this had not already been done.

The very fact that participants were asked to send questionnaires on to their siblings may imply that there would have to be some level of contact between the siblings. Therefore, it is possible that those who did not complete the questionnaire, or those whose sibling did not complete the questionnaire may not be as close as the 41 sibling dyads that did complete it.

Of the people who did not fill in the questionnaire it is impossible to tell whether this was because they did not want to share such personal information or because they felt unable or unwilling to ask their sibling to complete it.

### **3.8 Ethical issues**

This research complies with the Dublin Institute of Technology guidelines as outlined by its Research Ethics Committee. Furthermore, the Sociological Association of Ireland sets out the following ethical guidelines to which the Researcher adhered at all times:

#### **3.8.1 Responsibilities towards research participants:**

An e-mail was sent with each questionnaire to prospective respondents setting out the purpose of the research and asking for their consent before completing the questionnaire. It was explained to participants that once consent was given, it could be withdrawn at any stage without fear of negative consequences.

#### **3.8.2 Anonymity, privacy and confidentiality:**

In the covering e-mail it was explained to all prospective respondents that any data collected would be anonymous and confidential and there would be nothing in the results which would identify one or both members of the sibling dyad. No covert research was undertaken.

#### **3.8.3 Ethical practice in relations with sponsors and/or funders:**

This research was carried out without the presence of sponsors or funders and therefore the Researcher has no obligations to third parties.

In addition to these, Guthrie (2010) sets out professional standards which should also be adhered to, namely:

**3.8.4 The highest possible technical standards should be sought and maintained:**

The use of a pre-existing questionnaire ensured that the most salient information was obtained. A pilot study was carried out initially to test the online questionnaire and to ensure it could be completed within the stated timeframe without any difficulty.

**3.8.5 The Researcher should ensure that she is competent in her research:**

The Researcher made sure to adhere to ethical, professional and technical standards at all times and made use of resources available to her at DIT Mountjoy Square such as computer and library facilities.

**3.8.6 The Researcher should correctly represent her own expertise:**

In her original e-mail the Researcher set out this study would go towards obtaining her Masters Degree in Child, Family and Community Studies.

**3.8.7 Discrimination, exploitation or harassment should not be engaged in:**

Prospective respondents were assured that their consent would be voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time without risk of negative consequence.

**3.8.8 Conflicts of interest or their appearance should be avoided:**

By ensuring that the data which was returned to the Researcher was anonymous, respondents were assured that data collected would only be identified insofar as it related to the sibling dyad.

**3.8.9 Plagiarism should be avoided:**

The Researcher ensured that all relevant citations were used.



### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the way in which the research was designed and carried out. The suitability of survey methodology was discussed as it has been shown that survey research provides an insight into perceptions, opinions and attitudes (Guthrie, 2010). Limitations were addressed insofar as it was possible while considerations surrounding ethics were also highlighted.

A survey was conducted with 80 online questionnaires and 10 hard copy questionnaires being distributed. 133 responses were received, of which 41 sibling dyads were identified. The purpose of this study was to examine the sibling relationship in terms of warmth, conflict and rivalry and, through the use of a pre-existing questionnaire, to determine whether the relationship was perceived in similar ways by both members of the sibling dyad (Stocker et al., 1997).

## **4 RESULTS SECTION**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter will present the results of the analysis of data gathered using the short form Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire (Lanthier et al., 2000). Further discussion on the findings will be provided in Chapter 5.

As identified by Walliman (2011b), there can often be a low response rate for postal and online questionnaires. In the present study 90 questionnaires were distributed evenly to male and female prospective participants. They were asked to recruit the sibling closest in age to them to also respond and then forward the questionnaire to other people they knew who met the criteria of being over 18 with a sibling also aged over 18. If all target respondents and their siblings had responded, the Researcher could have expected to receive at least 180 responses. However, 133 responses were received, of which 41 sibling dyads were identified, resulting in a 74% response rate for target respondents and a 46% response rate for sibling dyads meaning that 49 responses were received from one half of the sibling dyad only. Rubin and Babbie (2010) suggest that a higher response rate will result in less chance of achieving a significant response bias, and as such, a response rate of over 70% is very good. However, for adequate analysis to be undertaken, a response rate of at least 50% is required. As discussed earlier, 71% of respondents were female and 21% were male, therefore, it is probable that more female participants forwarded the questionnaire to their siblings and to other possible participants.

### **4.2 Descriptive Statistics for Variables**

The data was split by gender and descriptive statistics were run for each variable. Table 3 below shows the average figure in terms of Intimacy, Emotional Support, Knowledge, which together make up “Warmth”; Quarrelling, Antagonism and Dominance which are understood to be “Conflict”; and Maternal and Paternal Rivalry which are classed as “Rivalry”.

As can be seen, on average respondents scored highest on Intimacy, Emotional Support and Knowledge scales, with female respondents scoring slightly higher

than male. Maternal and Paternal Rivalry scores were lowest, although female respondents scored higher on these than male respondents.

**Table 3 Means and Standard Deviations for all variables by Gender**

Descriptive Statistics						
Gender		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Male	Intimacy	39	10	24	17.92	4.325
	Emotional Support	39	6	24	17.79	4.601
	Knowledge	39	9	24	17.79	4.008
	Quarrelling	39	5	17	11.87	2.745
	Antagonism	39	6	18	12.08	3.149
	Dominance	39	6	17	11.49	3.219
	Maternal Rivalry	37	0	8	2.35	2.658
	Paternal Rivalry	38	0	33	1.92	5.528
Female	Intimacy	94	6	24	20.15	4.278
	Emotional Support	94	6	24	19.95	4.151
	Knowledge	94	8	24	19.50	4.163
	Quarrelling	94	5	20	11.87	3.306
	Antagonism	94	6	22	12.14	3.937
	Dominance	94	6	21	12.55	3.558
	Maternal Rivalry	94	0	12	3.13	3.240
	Paternal Rivalry	94	0	12	2.78	3.227

The research questions were based on previous research (Avioli, 1989; Cicirelli, 1991; Stocker et al., 1997 and White & Riedmann, 1992) and the results are presented below.

## *What Are The Effects Of Gender, Number Of Siblings And Level Of Contact On Warmth, Conflict And Rivalry In The Sibling Relationship?*

### *Effect of gender on warmth.*

An ANOVA test was run in order to compare the means for more than two groups to determine if the gender of the siblings determines the level of warmth in the sibling relationship.

There was a statistically significant difference between groups as determined by a one-way ANOVA ( $F(2,130) = 6.042, p < .005$ ). A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that the difference in warmth in the Sister-Sister relationship was significant ( $p < .005$ ) compared with the Brother-Brother but not with the Brother-Sister relationships ( $p > .05$ ). The difference in warmth between the Brother-Brother and Brother-Sister relationships was not found to be significant ( $p > .05$ ). Therefore, the relationship between sisters and brothers was found to be significantly warmer than the relationship between sisters and mixed gender dyads.

### *Effect of gender on rivalry.*

In examining the level of rivalry in same sex sibling dyads, an independent sample t-test was conducted which found a 3.46 mean for rivalry in the Brother-Brother group compared with a 5.67 mean in the Sister-Sister group. It found that  $t(65.451) = 2.435, p < 0.05$ . It was found that there was a significant difference at the 95% confidence level indicating that there was more rivalry in the Sister-Sister than the Brother-Brother relationship.

### *Effect of gender on conflict.*

An ANOVA test was run in order to compare the means for more than two groups to determine if the gender of the siblings determines the level of conflict in the sibling relationship.

There was a statistically significant difference between groups as determined by a one-way ANOVA ( $F(2,130) = 4.223, p < .05$ ). A Tukey post-hoc test revealed that the difference in conflict in the Sister-Sister relationship was significant ( $p < .005$ ) compared with the Brother-Sister but not the Brother-Brother relationships ( $p > .05$ ). As such, less conflict was found amongst mixed gender relationships than the same sex relationships.

*Correlation between number of siblings in family and warmth.*

In order to assess the relationship between the number of siblings in a family and the amount of warmth, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed. Findings show that there was a statistically significant correlation between the two variables,  $r = -0.221, n = 133, p < 0.01$ , meaning that the more children in a family, the less warmth is found in the sibling relationship.

*Correlation between number of siblings in family and rivalry.*

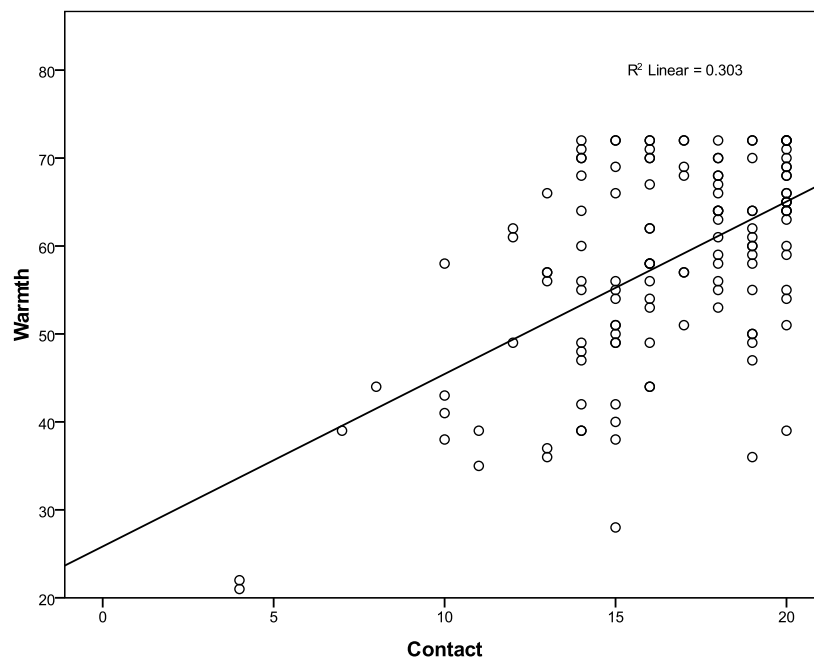
Using a Pearson product-moment correlation the relationship between the number of siblings in a family and the amount of rivalry was assessed. Findings show that there was a negative correlation between the two variables,  $r = -0.111, n = 131, p > .05$  meaning that the more children in a family, the less rivalry in the sibling relationship.

*Correlation between conflict and number of siblings in family.*

Again, in order to assess the relationship between the number of siblings in a family and the amount of conflict, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed. Findings show that there was a correlation between the two variables,  $r = 0.004, n = 133, p > .05$  meaning that the more children in a family, the more conflict in the sibling relationship, however this was not found to be statistically significant.

*Correlation between amount of contact and feelings of warmth.*

Using Pearson Correlation, a correlation was found to be significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) ( $r = .550$ ,  $n = 133$ ,  $p < .01$ ). As expected, a positive correlation was found to exist between contact and feelings of warmth between siblings meaning that as contact increases, so too do feelings of warmth as can be seen in Figure 3 below.



**Figure 3 Scattergram showing Correlation Between Warmth and Contact**

*Correlation between amount of contact and rivalry.*

In order to assess the relationship between the amount of contact between siblings and the amount of rivalry in the relationship, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed. Results show that there was a negative correlation between the two variables,  $r = -0.104$ ,  $n = 131$ ,  $p < 0.5$ . This means that the more contact between siblings, the less rivalry could be expected.

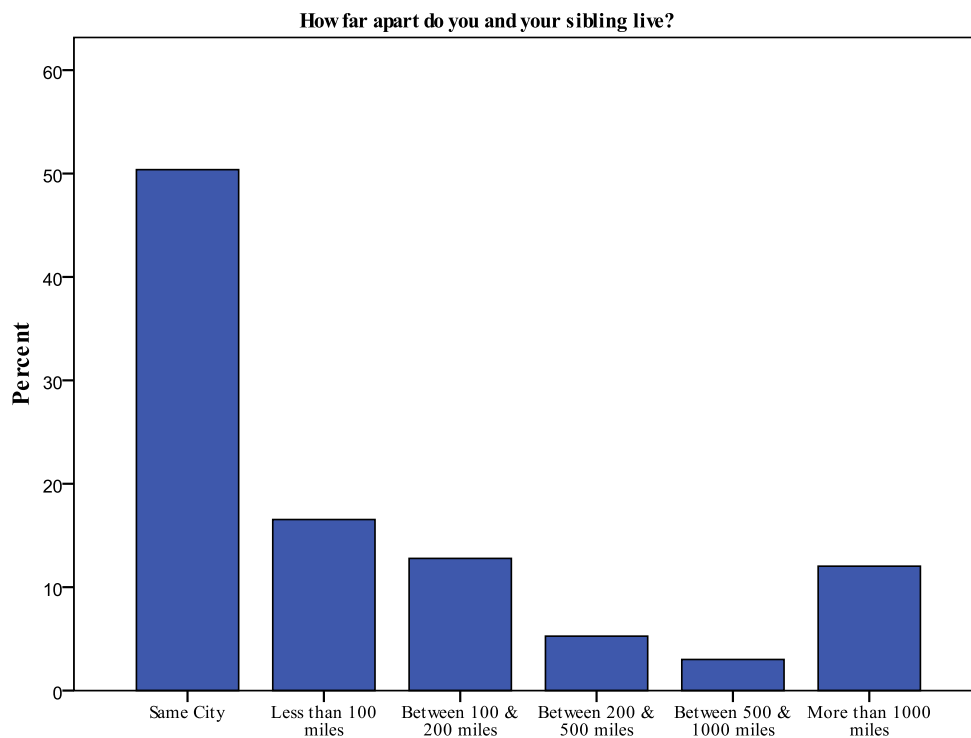
A summary of the correlations can be found at Table 4 below.

**Table 4 Correlations Between ASRQ Dimensions, Number of Siblings and Contact**

	ASRQ Factor		
Variable	Warmth	Conflict	Rivalry
Number of Siblings	-0.221*	0.004	-0.111
Contact	.550**	0.022	-0.104

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$

As Figure 4 below shows, results of the present study indicate that the majority of respondents lived in the same city as their sibling or within 100 miles of each other, however, 12.0% lived more than 1,000 miles apart.

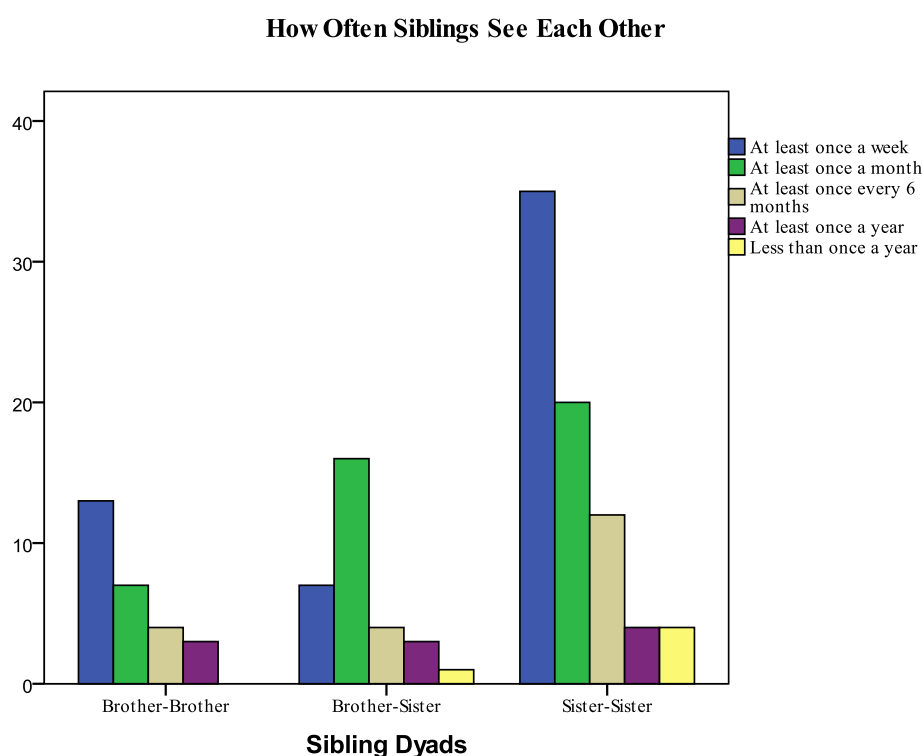


**Figure 4 Distance Apart that Siblings Live**

Of the respondents questioned, 41% of the Brother-Brother dyads reported that they telephoned each other at least once a week compared with 68% of Sister-Sister dyads. 4% of the Brother-Brother dyads telephoned each other less than once a

year compared to 3% of the Sister-Sister dyads while none of the Brother-Sister dyads would telephone each less than once a year.

When it came to seeing each other, 47% of Sister-Sister dyads seeing each other at least once a week compared with 23% of Brother-Sister dyads and 48% of Brother-Brother dyads. None of the Brother-Brother dyads reported seeing each other less than once a year while 5% of Sister-Sister dyads and 3% of Brother-Sister dyads saw each other less than once a year.



**Figure 5 How Often Siblings See Each Other**

### *Is The Type Of Support Provided Between Siblings Dependent On Gender?*

As can be seen from Figure 6 below, sisters were found to be more supportive, with 53% of sisters reporting that they expected to provide and receive both practical and emotional support. 41% of brothers reported that if their brother was stressed they would provide practical support only, while 33% would provide both practical and emotional support.

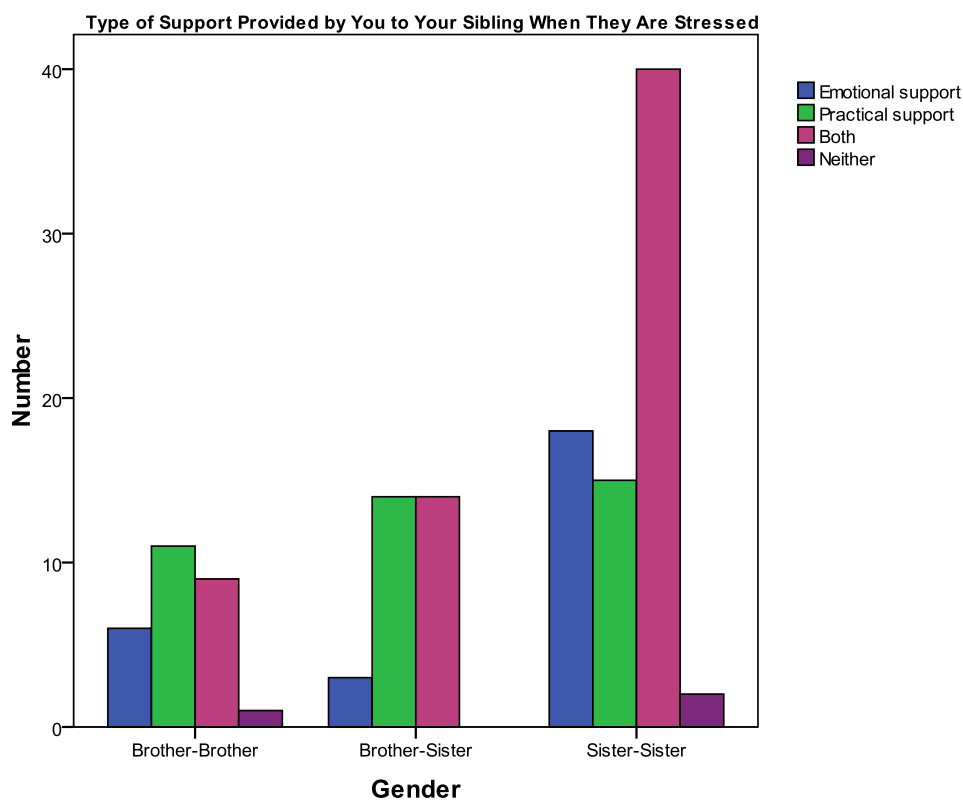


Of the Brother-Sister siblings, 45% expected to give both practical and emotional support while 52% expected to receive both.

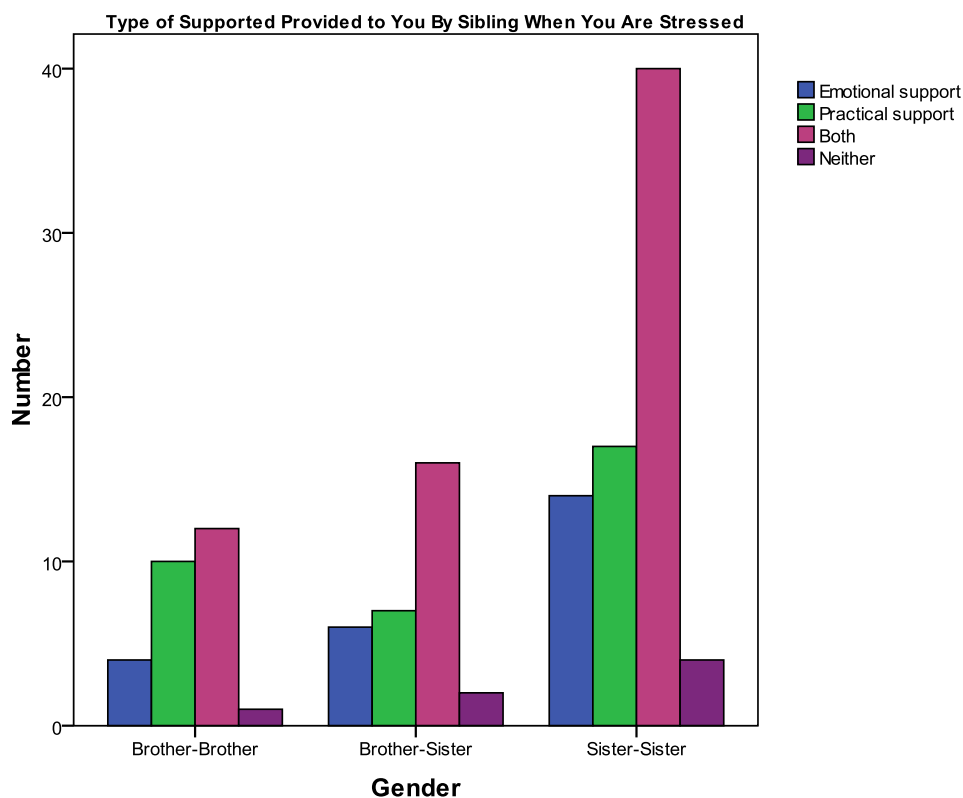
However, 3% of respondents reported that they would not provide either practical or emotional support to their sister which compared with 5% who, in turn, expected that their sister would not provide either type of support to them.

While 4% of male respondents expected that they would not provide either emotional or practical support to their brother, the same number felt that their brother would provide neither type of support to them if they were stressed.

Although 6% of mixed gender siblings expected that they would receive no support from their sibling, none of them anticipated that they would not provide either emotional or practical support to their sibling compared with.



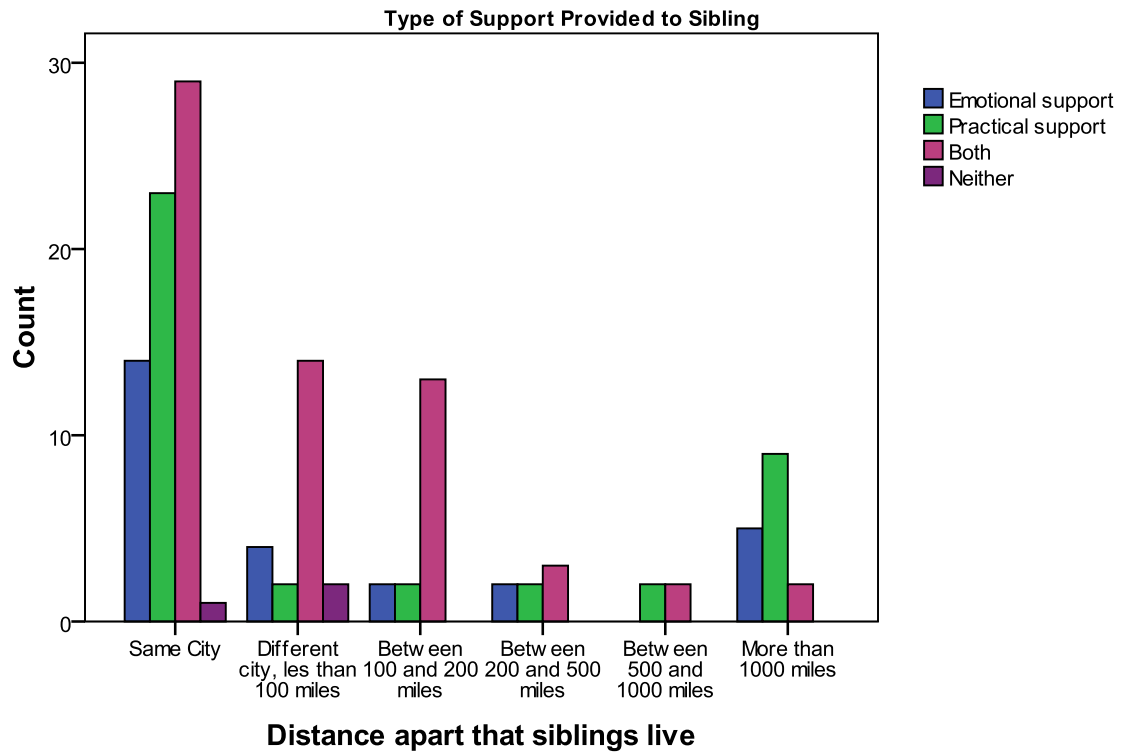
**Figure 6 Type of Support Provided by Respondent to Sibling**



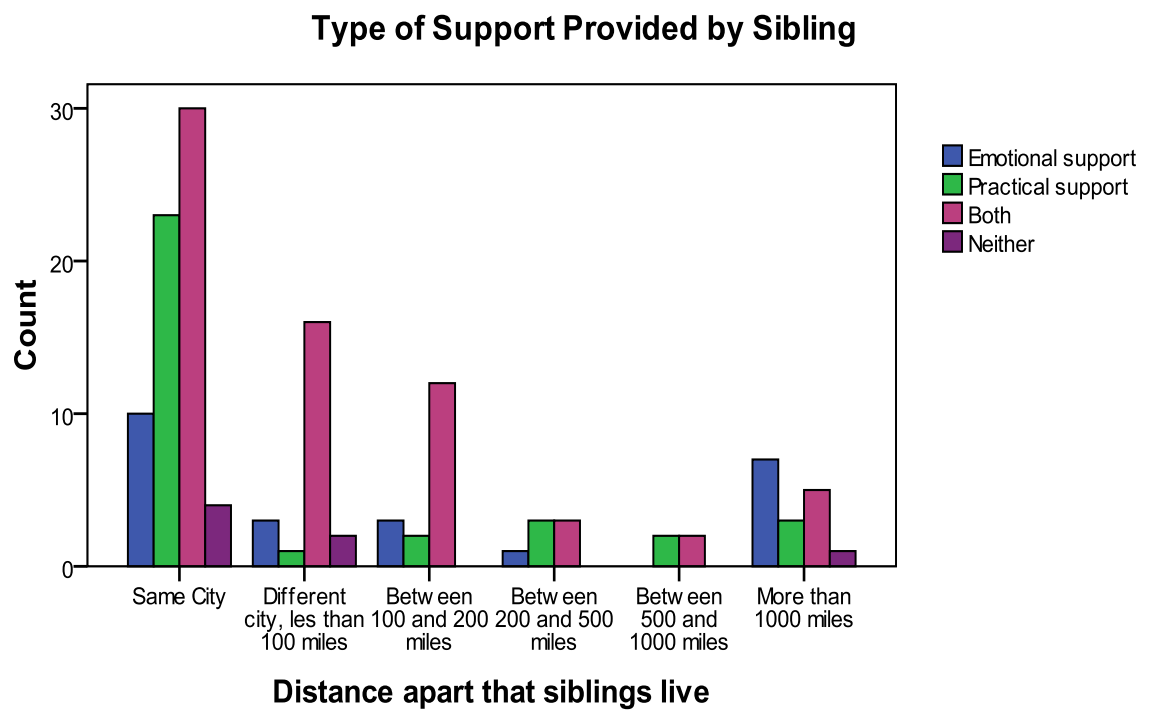
**Figure 7 Type of Support Provided by Sibling to Respondent**

As can be seen from Figures 8 and 9 below, the findings of the present study indicate that the greatest amount of support is provided by siblings who live in the same city as each other, with 11% saying that they would provide practical support, 17% would provide emotional support and 22% would provide both practical and emotional support. A difference can be seen when these figures are compared with the type of support respondents thought their sibling would provide, with 17% stating that their sibling would provide practical support, 8% would provide emotional support and 23% reporting that their sibling would provide both practical and emotional support.

Of siblings who live more than 1,000 miles apart 4% reported that they would provide emotional support compared with 7% who would provide practical support and 2% who would provide both practical and emotional support.



**Figure 8 Type of support provided by Respondent to Sibling**



**Figure 9 Type of Support Provided by Sibling to Respondent**

### ***Comparison of Siblings' Responses***

Of 41 sibling dyads that completed the questionnaire, the gender breakdown was as follows:

**Table 5 Gender of Siblings**

<b>All Male Siblings</b>	<b>All Female Siblings</b>	<b>Mixed Gender Siblings</b>
8	24	9

Of the 49 questions in the ARSQ-S, the lowest number of corresponding answers for the all male siblings was 21 and highest number was 31. The lowest number of corresponding answers for the all female siblings was 15 and the highest number was 44 whereas for the mixed gender siblings, the lowest number was 18 and the highest number was 37.

In order to understand the siblings' perception of their relationship, their answers were compared and results can be seen in Table 6 below.

**Table 6 Percentage of Siblings with Corresponding Answers**

<b>No. of Corresponding Answers</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Mixed</b>	<b>Total</b>
40 – 48	0%	5%	0%	5%
30 – 39	3%	12%	7%	22%
20 – 29	17%	27%	12%	56%
10 – 19	0%	15%	2%	17%
1 – 9	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total	20%	59%	21%	100%

Below is a table of the questions which elicited the most accurate responses:

**Table 7 Most Commonly Answered Question**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Percentage of siblings with corresponding answers</b>
Q14. How much does this sibling know about you? / Q15. How much do you know about this sibling?	88%
Q46. Does this sibling think your father is / was closer to him/her or you? / Q47. Do you think your father is / was closer to you or this sibling?	67%
Q48. How much do you know about this sibling's ideas / Q49. How much does this sibling know about your ideas?	65%

The questions eliciting the least accurate responses were:

**Table 8 Least Commonly Answered Question**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Percentage of Siblings with Differing answers</b>
Q44. How often does this sibling act in superior ways to you? / Q45. How often do you act in superior ways to this sibling?	62%
Q12. Do you think your mother favours / favoured you or this sibling more? Q13. Does this sibling think your mother favours / favoured him/her or you more?	61%
Q28. How much is this sibling bossy with you? / Q29. How much are you bossy with this sibling?	61%

In terms of accurate responses, one set of female twins had the most similar responses; with only 3 sets of questions having different answers: how bossy they are with each other; the amount they disagree with each other and how much of

each other's ideas they know. The next most accurate had 6 answers with differing responses and was also an all female sibling dyad.

Of the three sets of twins (two sets of all female twins, one set of mixed gender twins), and as mentioned above, one set of female twins had the highest amount of corresponding answers, with 44 corresponding answers. The second set of female twins had 40 corresponding answers while the mixed gender twins had 37 corresponding answers.

## **5 DISCUSSION SECTION**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This section will first discuss the key findings of this study as presented in Chapter 4 and thereafter will consider the findings in the context of the relevant literature. In particular, the following research questions were asked:

*Research Question 1: What Are The Effects Of Gender, Number Of Siblings And Level Of Contact On Warmth, Conflict And Rivalry In The Sibling Relationship?*

*Research Question 2: Is The Type Of Support Provided Between Siblings Dependent On Gender?*

### **5.2 Discussion Of Findings**

In order to examine the findings of this study, this chapter will be broken up by research question. As discussed, the aim of the study was to contribute to a greater understanding of the sibling relationship, particularly from the perspective of both siblings in the dyad and so this will be discussed separately.

*Research Question 1: What Are The Effects Of Gender, Number Of Siblings And Level Of Contact On Warmth, Conflict And Rivalry In The Sibling Relationship?*

*The effect of gender on the warmth of the sibling relationship.*

In line with previous findings, the present study found a significant difference between groups, with greater warmth in the Sister-Sister relationship compared with the Brother-Brother relationship and Brother-Sister relationship.

This was consistent with previous research showing a strong correlation between gender and warmth of the sibling relationship, with sisters being closest, followed by cross-sex siblings and finally, brothers (Cicirelli, 1994; Dunn, 2002; Lee et al., 1990). One suggested reason for this finding is that women are socialised to

become nurturers and to express themselves emotionally (Dunn, 2002). As the quality of the adult sibling relationship is influenced by the relationship between the siblings in childhood, siblings who were not close in childhood are unlikely to become close in adulthood (Connidis, 1989).

*The effect of gender on rivalry experienced in the sibling relationship.*

In line with previous research carried out by Stocker et al. (1997) when examining the level of rivalry in same sex sibling dyads, a gender difference was found to exist, with more rivalry being experienced amongst female siblings than amongst male siblings. In comparing male and female responses on rivalry, male respondents scored higher for paternal rivalry than maternal rivalry whereas female respondents' scores were equal for both.

While it has been shown that having a sister may lead to increased life satisfaction (McGhee, 1985), it is also possible that same-sex relationships may be a source of rivalry (Cicirelli, 1995). Studies show that increased competition and rivalry may occur because same-sex siblings can be easily compared by parents and teachers (Bedford, 1996), often unrealistically and unfairly (Whiteman & Buchanan, 2002) leading to rivalry and negative feelings (Cicirelli, 1995)

Kennedy & Kramer (2008) suggest that childhood and adolescent relationships which are characterised by hostility, generally do not change throughout adulthood. The literature shows conflicting reports of whether or not rivalry continues into adulthood with Ross and Milgram (1982) finding that 45% of 22 to 93 year olds reported feeling rivalry towards their sibling, while Cicirelli (1982) reported that 88% of middle aged respondents rarely or never argued with a sibling and Gold (1989c) found that 90% of elderly siblings did not fit a hostile typology.

*The effect of gender on conflict.*

In the present study, gender was found to have an effect on the amount of conflict in the sibling relationship with mixed gender siblings reporting less conflict than same sex siblings. These findings are consistent with previous research which shows that



gender can play a role in the presence of tension or conflict in the sibling relationship, with same sex siblings reporting more conflict than siblings of the opposite sex (Stocker et al. 1997). Studies show that sisterly relationships may, in particular, be prone to tension (Bedford, 1989; Downing 1988) which also appeared to be the case in this study.

*The effect of number of siblings in a family on warmth and rivalry.*

Findings of the present study showed negative correlations existed between number of siblings in a family and warmth as well as number of siblings and rivalry meaning that the more children in a family, the less warmth and rivalry they will experience. This differed with the findings of previous research that the number of siblings in a family is negatively correlated with warmth and positively correlated with rivalry, results which Stocker et al. (1997) found surprising and which they attribute to the limited availability of parental love and attention in larger families, which may contribute to increased levels of rivalry and less warmth between siblings. The findings of the current study would suggest that this was not the case amongst the respondents questioned.

A possible reason for this discrepancy was the difference in age amongst the samples in the present study and those in the previous research. In the Stocker et al. (1997) study the average of participants in their Colorado sample was 20 and the average age of siblings was 23. In their Indiana sample, the average age of participants was 19, while the average age of their siblings was 22. As discussed in Chapter 3, the average age of participants in the present study was 36 and the average age of their siblings was also 36. Although it is believed that issues about parental favouritism may continue into adulthood (Stocker et al., 1997), and studies have found that 45% of 22 to 93 year olds reported feeling rivalry towards their sibling (Ross & Milgram, 1982), it is suggested that rivalry and conflict may diminish in adulthood, with Cicirelli (1982) finding that 88% of middle aged respondents rarely or never argued with a sibling.

*The effect of level of contact between siblings on rivalry and warmth.*

The present study found a correlation between level of contact and warmth, meaning that as contact between siblings increases, so too do feelings of warmth. However, a negative correlation was found to exist between level of contact and rivalry between the siblings so that the more contact between siblings, the less rivalry exists. These findings correspond with those reported by Stocker et al. (1997), the reason for which they suggest is that siblings may keep in close contact with the siblings with whom they experience a warm relationship. On the other hand siblings whose relationship is characterised by rivalry may have less contact. Research suggests that the closeness of the relationship between siblings is likely to determine how often they interact (Cicirelli, 1985; Gold, 1989a) as does the siblings' perception of the relationship (Stocker et al., 1997).

In the present study, the majority of respondents reported seeing each other at least once a week or once a month. The fact that 50% of siblings in the present study reported living in the same city may impact these findings. It is possible the fact that such a high proportion of siblings live in the same city is because most participants live in Dublin, as the majority of the three samples are based in Dublin. However, it is worth questioning if their close proximity is because Dublin is where they grew up, where they moved for college or work or if, perhaps, they live in the same city because of the closeness of their sibling relationship.

Contrary to the findings of Matthews et al. (1989) which show that almost half of brother dyads saw each other only once or twice a year, the findings of the present study showed 48% of brother dyads saw each other at least once a week. Matthews et al. (1989) found that of the brothers who saw each other more often, they also telephoned each other regularly and the present study found this to be true of all dyads. Although sisters scored higher when it came to telephoning each other than did brothers or mixed gender dyads.

The present study found that the majority of respondents meet up at family events at least once every six months or at least once a year which is consistent with Allan (1977), who found that the majority of respondents met up for special occasions

rather than socialising with each other as they would with friends. It has been suggested that sibling relationships differ from friendships in that the purpose of contact is maintenance of the relationship rather than socialising and friendship and, as such, it is often the parents of siblings who facilitate contact by hosting family occasions (Allan, 1977).

The findings of the present study showed that the majority of respondents phoned their sibling at least once a week. This was slightly higher than the findings of White and Riedmann (1992) who reported that the average adult has some contact with a sibling once or twice a month for 60 or 70 years after leaving home. It should also be noted that in the present study, participants were asked to recruit the sibling closest in age to them irrespective of whether or not they were intimately close and it is therefore possible that the siblings may have greater contact with another sibling.

*Research Question 2: Is The Type Of Support Provided Between Siblings Dependent On Gender?*

As discussed, studies show that there are two types of support which siblings can provide to each other; instrumental, which is also known as practical, and expressive, also known as emotional. Findings of the present study showed a significant difference along gender lines in the type of support which respondents expected to provide to, and receive from, their sibling. Sister-Sister relationships were expected to be more supportive than Brother-Brother and mixed gender relationships. This finding was in line with previous research which found that sisters provide more emotional support to their siblings than brothers (Cicirelli, 1991; White & Riedmann, 1992). Research shows sisters to be more helpful than brothers (Block 1984; Jacklin & Reynolds, 1993) while Voorpostel et al. (2007) found that men are more likely to provide practical support and women are more likely to provide emotional support.

It is suggested that geographic distance may have a bearing on which type of support is provided, as instrumental or practical support requires relatively close

proximity (Avioli, 1989). The findings of the present study showed that the greatest amount of support (both practical and emotional) would be provided by siblings in the same city and those who live less than 100 miles apart.

While emotional support can be provided whether or not the siblings live near each other (Avioli, 1989), the present study found that only 4% of participants who live more than 1,000 miles apart reported that they would provide emotional support. On the other hand, 7% of respondents said that they would provide practical support to their sibling and 2% said that they would provide both. None of the respondents living between 500 and 1,000 miles apart felt that they would provide emotional support to their sibling if they were stressed. These findings differ from the findings of Voorpostel and Van der Lippe (2007), who found that emotional support exchange increases with greater distance.

#### *Comparison Of Siblings' Answers*

As discussed in the methodology section, 48 questions in the ASRQ-S can be paired with a similar question, the responses to which were compared in order to establish if the siblings have a similar view of their relationship. The response to one question was compared with the response to the next question on the sibling's questionnaire. For example, the response to Question 8. How much does this sibling try to cheer you up when you are feeling down? was compared with the response to Question 9. How much do you try to cheer this sibling up when he or she is feeling down? and vice versa (Lanthier et al., 2000).

While 67% of respondents agreed with their sibling about who their father is or was closest to, 61% also disagreed with their sibling about who their mother favours or favoured. It should be noted, however, that the majority of respondents and their siblings were female, and it is not known if this would have a bearing on how they view their maternal relationship.

There was a distinct difference between the respondents' and their sibling's perception of how they behave, as could be seen in the 62% of sibling dyads who disagreed about how often they and their sibling act in superior ways to the other,

and 61% of whom disagreed on how bossy they are with each other. It is also worth noting that although 88% of respondents had the same view of their relationship when they were asked how much they and their sibling knew about each other, only 47% of respondents agree on how much they dominate and are dominated by their sibling. This would seem to suggest that despite how much they think they know each other, siblings were unaware of how much of their behaviour was interpreted as an attempt at domination.

In terms of accurate responses, one set of female twins achieved the most similar responses; with only 3 sets of questions resulting in different answers: how bossy they are with each other; the amount they disagree with each other and how much of each other's ideas they know. The next most accurate sibling dyad had only 9 answers with differing responses and it was an all female sibling dyad. The answers of the three sets of twins (two all female, one mixed gender) included in this study were found to closely correspond with each other, with the two sets of female twins answers mostly closely matching each others, followed by the mixed gender twins.

All male siblings had the lowest range of answers, ranging from 21 to 31 corresponding answers whereas mixed gender siblings' responses ranged from 18 to 37, with the greatest range being found amongst female siblings as they ranged from 15 to 44. While two sets of female siblings had the most responses in common, more female siblings than male or mixed gender also had the fewest responses in common. This would suggest that while sisters might be most likely to share a similar perception of the sibling relationship, the ones whose perception of the relationship disagrees, are likely to disagree about more things than brothers or mixed gender siblings.

### **5.3 Summary**

This chapter discussed the research findings of the present study. The discussion highlighted the effects of gender on warmth, conflict and rivalry. Gender was also found to be important when it came to the type of support provided between siblings when one was feeling stressed. The majority of female respondents

reported that they would offer both practical and emotional support. Once again, gender was a factor in the comparison of siblings' answers, with female siblings having more corresponding answers than male or mixed gender sibling pairs.

The findings of the present study were found to be consistent with previous research in most cases, apart from the effect of the number of siblings on rivalry. Stocker et al. (1997) had found a positive correlation between the two, which they attributed to the limited availability of parental love and attention in larger families. A possible reason for the discrepancy in the present study was discussed in that the mean age of the respondents in the present study was higher than those who took part in the previous study.

## **6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Conclusion**

As discussed, the sibling relationship is not a simple matter of asking whether siblings are friends or rivals. Most sibling relationships are more complicated than that, with varying degrees of warmth, conflict and rivalry. Sibling relationships are unique in their length and durability (White, 2001). For the most part, they span the whole lifetime of individuals who evolve from children to adults, experiencing highs and lows, joyous events, heartaches and disappointments which life throws at one or both of them along the way. Sibling relationships often start off being unequal, usually with the oldest child having more power and gradually they may become more egalitarian over the years as the balance of power shifts (Stocker et al., 1997).

Despite sharing the same background, family and genetics, the sibling relationship may not automatically or necessarily be characterised as one of friendship (Lamb, 1982; White, 2001; Bedford, 1998; Connidis, 2007). Siblings may be seen as rivals and competitors at home, at school and amongst the wider family or community, especially if they share the same interests (Bedford, 1996) and as has been shown in the present study, if they share the same gender.

Each relationship is unique, with number of siblings, size of age gaps between siblings and gender constellations, but the relationship is not just affected by the two individual siblings as external issues such as sibling characteristics, parental relationships and economic prosperity also having a bearing on it (Furman & Lanthier, 1996; Stoneman & Brody, 1993). Some of these issues may contribute to the levels of warmth, conflict and rivalry which exist between siblings (Stocker et al., 1997).

Research undertaken over recent decades has looked at the sibling relationship in terms of support, solidarity, companionship and well-being (Allan, 1977; Bedford, 1995; Connidis & Davies, 1990; O'Bryant, 1988). rivalry, conflict and ambivalence (Allan, 1977; Bedford, 1998; Connidis, 2007).

The present study was carried out using a pre-existing questionnaire in order to examine the effects of gender, number of siblings and level of contact on warmth, conflict and rivalry in the sibling relationship. The Researcher compared the answers of 41 sibling dyads in order to determine whether the relationship was perceived in similar ways by both members of the sibling dyad. In most instances, the results of the present study were found to be consistent with previous research by Stocker et al. (1997).

Findings showed that gender was an important factor in all aspects of the sibling relationship, with female respondents being more likely to have a warm relationship but also more likely to experience rivalry in the relationship. Conflict was more likely to be present amongst same sex dyads than mixed gender pairs.

Number of siblings was found to be negatively correlated with warmth and positively correlated with conflict, meaning that the more siblings in the family, the less warmth amongst siblings and the more conflict. The findings of the present differed from previous research (Stocker et al., 1997) as number of siblings was found to be negatively correlated with rivalry. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, the mean age of the respondents in the present study was higher than that of the respondents in the previous research which may have led to less rivalry, as Cicirelli (1982) suggests that rivalry and conflict may diminish in adulthood.

Contact was found to be positively correlated with warmth and conflict but negatively correlated with rivalry, meaning that the more warmth and conflict between siblings, the higher the level of contact. These findings were consistent with the authors of the questionnaire used in the present study who suggested that siblings with warm relationships keep in close contact whereas those with high levels of rivalry may have less contact.

Gender was also found to be a factor in the type of support which respondents expected to provide to, and receive from, their sibling, with sisters being more supportive than brothers and mixed gender siblings, findings which were consistent with previous research (Cicirelli, 1991; White & Riedmann, 1992).



It had been expected that emotional support would increase with distance (Voorpostel & Van der Lippe, 2007), yet the findings of the present study showed that while the greatest amount of support (both practical and emotional) was provided by siblings in the same city and those who live less than 100 miles apart, a greater percentage of siblings living 1,000 miles apart felt that they would provide more practical than emotional support to their sibling.

Again, gender was found to be important in the way siblings perceived the relationship, with the answers of more sisters corresponding to each other than those of brothers or mixed gender siblings. As highlighted in Chapter 4, male and female respondents scored highest on questions which tested for Intimacy, Emotional Support and Knowledge, followed by those testing Quarrelling, Antagonism and Dominance. Maternal Rivalry was found to be higher for both male and female respondents than Paternal Rivalry, with female respondents scoring higher on both than male respondents.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

A number of recommendations arose from the results of the present study which, if undertaken, may add to the literature on the subject of sibling relationships and which will be discussed below.

In order to gain a greater insight into the sibling relationship, future research might be undertaken to investigate if siblings who perceive their parents as treating them equally, have an egalitarian relationship with each other, compared with those who feel one or both parents favour one sibling over the other.

Additional research should also include more siblings in late adulthood in order to gain a greater understanding of how the relationship is experienced across the lifespan.

Future research might investigate whether the sibling relationship does, as suggested by White & Riedmann (1992), move from the inner circle of childhood to

the outer circle of young and middle adulthood, before once again returning to the inner circle in late adulthood.

A mixed method approach might also be considered in the future so that the siblings' perceptions of their relationship could be explored in greater detail through the use of semi-structured interviews.

It would appear from the findings of this study that twins share a similar perception of their relationship. However, further research on this is needed to determine if this was as a result of a greater shared understanding of their relationship or if it was based primarily on gender as the twins included in the present study were either both female or mixed gender. The inclusion of an equal amount of both male, both female and mixed gender twins should facilitate this.

As discussed, a discrepancy was found in the present study between siblings' perception of their and their sibling's dominance over each other. Future research might consider examining this further by questioning whether individuals who felt dominated by a sibling in childhood continued to experience this in adulthood or not.

The purpose of this study was to add to the understanding of the relationship. The Researcher examined the sibling relationship by questioning the effects of gender, family size and level of contact on warmth, conflict and rivalry. Using an existing questionnaire, the ASRQ-S, she compared the answers of 41 sibling dyads in order to determine whether the relationship was perceived in similar ways by both members of the sibling dyad. The issue of whether or not the type of support provided between siblings was determined by gender was also examined. The findings of the present study were found to be consistent in most instances with those of previous studies.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Letter / E-mail to Prospective Respondents**

#### **To whom it may concern**

I am currently doing a Masters in Child, Family and Community Studies at Dublin Institute of Technology, Mountjoy Square. I am writing to you because I am undertaking a research project into adult relationships from the perspective of two siblings.

I would be really grateful if you would complete the attached questionnaire. Once you have completed the questionnaire, I would be grateful if you would forward this second questionnaire to your sibling (if you have more than one sibling, please send it to the sibling closest in age to you, providing they are over 18 years of age). The questionnaire should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. [Once completed, please return it to me in the enclosed self-addressed envelope.]

I can confirm that all data will be collected anonymously. You will see from the first page of the questionnaire, there is a question asking for your mother's maiden name – this is purely so that sibling dyads can be identified. In every other respect, the information collected will be anonymous. Once the data is input and analysed, all questionnaires will be securely destroyed.

Participation is completely voluntary and participants are at liberty to withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences. The final report will not contain any information which will in any way identify any individual or sibling dyad. Should you have any queries or concerns regarding this study, please contact me at [d10119905@mydit.ie](mailto:d10119905@mydit.ie) or Dr Rosaleen McElvaney, Dissertation Supervisor, Dublin Institute of Technology at [4024164](tel:4024164) or by e-mail: [rosaleen.mcelvaney@dit.ie](mailto:rosaleen.mcelvaney@dit.ie).

If you know of other people who you think might be interested in completing the questionnaire based on their relationship with their siblings, I'd be grateful if you could let me know their name and address, and I will forward a questionnaire to them and their sibling.

Many thanks,

Yours faithfully

Edel Wallace

## **Appendix 2**

### **Letter to Prospective Respondents' Siblings**

#### **To whom it may concern**

I am currently doing a Masters in Child, Family and Community Studies at Dublin Institute of Technology, Mountjoy Square. I am writing to you because I am undertaking a research project into adult relationships from the perspective of two siblings and your sibling has kindly agreed to take part.

I would be really grateful if you would complete the attached questionnaire which should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. Once completed, please return it to me in the enclosed self-addressed envelope.

I can confirm that all data will be collected anonymously. You will see from the first page of the questionnaire, there is a question asking for your mother's maiden name - this is purely so that sibling dyads can be identified. In every other respect, the information collected will be anonymous. Once the data is input and analysed, all questionnaires will be securely destroyed.

Participation is completely voluntary and participants are at liberty to withdraw at any time without prejudice or negative consequences. The final report will not contain any information which will in any way identify any individual or sibling dyad. Should you have any queries or concerns regarding this study, please contact me at [d10119905@mydit.ie](mailto:d10119905@mydit.ie) or Dr Rosaleen McElvaney, Dissertation Supervisor, Dublin Institute of Technology at [4024164](tel:4024164) or by e-mail: [rosaleen.mcelvaney@dit.ie](mailto:rosaleen.mcelvaney@dit.ie).

If you know of other people who you think might be interested in completing the questionnaire based on their relationship with their siblings, I'd be grateful if you could let me know their name and address, and I will forward a questionnaire to them and their sibling.

Many thanks,

Yours faithfully

Edel Wallace

### Appendix 3

#### Adult Sibling Relationship Questionnaire

##### *Instructions and Basic Information*

This questionnaire is concerned with your relationship with one of your siblings. Each question asks you to rate how much different behaviors and feelings occur in your relationship. Try and answer each question as quickly and accurately as you can. Try and answer the questions as your relationship is now, not how it was in the past, nor how you think it might be in the future. In the remainder of the questionnaire, whenever you see THIS SIBLING or YOUR SIBLING we are talking about the specific sibling you are completing the study about. We begin by asking you some general questions about your sibling and yourself. Please circle, check, or fill in the correct response.

##### **What is your mother's maiden name?**

(If your sibling is a half-sibling, please indicate BOTH your and your sibling's mothers' maiden names. Please note that this information is for administrative purposes only)

Mother's maiden name \_\_\_\_\_

##### **Age**

(Please enter age in numbers, e.g. 27)

1a) Your age: \_\_\_\_\_

1b) This sibling's age: \_\_\_\_\_

##### **Gender**

(Please circle the correct response)

2a) Your gender:      Male    Female

2b) This sibling's gender:      Male    Female

##### **Birth order**

(Please choose the correct response)

	First born	Second born	Third born	Fourth born	Later born
Your birth order	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
This sibling's birth order	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How far does this sibling live from you?

(Please circle the correct response)

1) same city

2) different city, less than 100 miles

3) between 100 & 200 miles

4) between 200 and 500 miles

5) between 500 and 1000 miles

6) more than 1,000 miles

**Amount of Contact between siblings**

(Please choose the correct response)

	At least once a week	At least once a month	At least once every 6 months	At least once a year	Less than once a year
How often do you and this sibling see each other?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How often does this sibling phone you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How often do you phone this sibling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How often do you and this sibling see each other for family gatherings and events?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**What is your relationship to this sibling?**

(Please choose the correct response. If choosing Other, please explain why)

Biological sibling ☐

Twin ☐

Step sibling ☐

Half sibling ☐

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you have children?  
children?**

(Please choose the correct response)

Yes ☐

No ☐

**Does this sibling have**

(Please choose the correct response)

Yes ☐

No ☐

**What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

Primary ☐

Secondary ☐

Third level ☐

**Now we would like some information about your other siblings**

(Please do not include this sibling here)

Age	Gender	Relationship (bio, step, twin)	Age	Gender	Relationship (bio, step, twin)
Sib #1: _____	M F	_____	Sib #2: _____	M F	_____
Sib #3: _____	M F	_____	Sib #4: _____	M F	_____
Sib #5: _____	M F	_____	Sib #6: _____	M F	_____

Sib #7: \_\_\_\_ M F \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Sib #8: \_\_\_\_ M F

### Questions 1 – 5

(Please choose the correct response)

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Regularly
1. How much do you talk to this sibling about things that are important to you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. How much does this sibling talk to you about things that are important to him or her?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. How much do you and this sibling argue with each other?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. How much do you irritate this sibling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. How much does this sibling irritate you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 6) Do you think your mother favours / favoured you or this sibling more?

I am usually favoured	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am sometimes favoured	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neither of us is favoured	<input type="checkbox"/>
This sibling is sometimes favoured	<input type="checkbox"/>
This sibling is usually favoured	<input type="checkbox"/>

### 7) Does this sibling think your mother favours him/her or you more?

I am usually favoured	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am sometimes favoured	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neither of us is favoured	<input type="checkbox"/>
This sibling is sometimes favoured	<input type="checkbox"/>
This sibling is usually favoured	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Questions 8 – 11

(Please choose the correct response)

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Regularly
8. How much does this sibling try to cheer you up when you are feeling down?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. How much do you try to cheer this sibling up when he or she is feeling down?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. How much do you dominate this sibling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. How much does this sibling dominate you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



**12. Do you think your father favours / favoured you or this sibling more?**

(Please choose the correct response)

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| I am / was usually favoured              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I am / was sometimes favoured            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Neither of us is / was favoured          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| This sibling is / was sometimes favoured | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| This sibling is / was usually favoured   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**13. Does this sibling think your father favours / favoured him/her or you more?**

(Please choose the correct response)

- |  |                          |    |                  |
|--|--------------------------|----|------------------|
| I am / was usually favoured              | <input type="checkbox"/> |    |                  |
| I am / was sometimes favoured            | <input type="checkbox"/> |    |                  |
| Neither of us is / was favoured          | <input type="checkbox"/> |    |                  |
| This sibling is / was sometimes favoured | <input type="checkbox"/> |    |                  |
| This sibling is / was usually favoured   | <input type="checkbox"/> | as | usually favoured |

**Questions 14 – 15**

(Please choose the correct response)

- |  | <b>Hardly Anything</b>   | <b>Very Little</b>       | <b>A Lot</b>             |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 14. How much does this sibling know about you? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. How much do you know about this sibling?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Questions 16 – 21**

(Please choose the correct response)

- |  | <b>Never</b>             | <b>Rarely</b>            | <b>Occasionally</b>      | <b>Regularly</b>         |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 16. How much do you discuss your feelings or personal issues with this sibling?      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. How much does this sibling discuss his/her feelings or personal issues with you? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 18. How often does this sibling criticise you?                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 19. How often do you criticise this sibling?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Regularly
20. How often does this sibling do things to make you angry?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
21. How often do you do things to make this sibling angry?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**22. Does this sibling think your mother supports/supported him/her or you more?**

I usually get/got more support	<input type="checkbox"/>
I sometimes get/got more support	<input type="checkbox"/>
We are/were supported equally	<input type="checkbox"/>
This sibling sometimes gets/got more support	<input type="checkbox"/>
This sibling usually gets/got more support	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neither of us is/was supported	<input type="checkbox"/>

**23. Do you think your mother supports/supported you or this sibling more?**

I usually get/got more support	<input type="checkbox"/>
I sometimes get/got more support	<input type="checkbox"/>
We are/were supported equally	<input type="checkbox"/>
This sibling sometimes gets/got more support	<input type="checkbox"/>
This sibling usually gets/got more support	<input type="checkbox"/>
Neither of us is/was supported	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Questions 24 – 25**

	Hardly at all	A little	Quite a lot	A lot
24. How much can you count on this sibling to be supportive when you are feeling stressed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
25. How much can this sibling count on you to be supportive when he/she is feeling stressed?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**26. When you are stressed is this sibling more likely to provide emotional or practical support?**

(Please choose the correct response, e.g. emotional support might be listening/advising; practical support might be helping in a practical way)

- Emotional support ☐
- Practical support ☐
- Both ☐
- Neither ☐

**27. When this sibling is stressed are you more likely to provide emotional or practical support?**

(Please choose the correct response, e.g. emotional support might be listening/advising; practical support might be helping in a practical way)

- Emotional support ☐
- Practical support ☐
- Both ☐
- Neither ☐

**Questions 28 – 29**

(Please choose the correct response)

- |   | <b>Never</b>             | <b>Rarely</b>            | <b>Occasionally</b>      | <b>Regularly</b>         |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 28. How much is this sibling bossy with you?  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 29. How much are you bossy with this sibling? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**30. Does this sibling think your father supports/supported him/her or you more?**

- I usually get/got more support ☐
- I sometimes get/got more support ☐
- We are/were supported equally ☐
- This sibling sometimes gets/got more support ☐
- This sibling usually gets/got more support ☐
- Neither of us is/was supported ☐

**31. Do you think your father supports/supported you or this sibling more?**

- I usually get/got more support ☐
- I sometimes get/got more support ☐
- We are/were supported equally ☐
- This sibling sometimes gets/got more support ☐
- This sibling usually gets/got more support ☐
- Neither of us is/was supported ☐

**Questions 32 – 33**

(Please choose the correct response)

	<b>Hardly Anything</b>	<b>A Little</b>	<b>A Lot</b>
32. How much do you know about this sibling's relationships	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
33. How much does this sibling know about your relationships?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Questions 34 – 35**

(Please choose the correct response)

	<b>Hardly At All</b>	<b>A Little</b>	<b>A Lot</b>
34. How much do you really understand this sibling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
35. How much does this sibling really understand you?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Questions 36 – 39**

(Please choose the correct response)

	<b>Never</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Regularly</b>
36. How much does this sibling disagree with you about things?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
37. How much do you disagree with this sibling about things?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
38. How much does this sibling put you down?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
39. How much do you put this sibling down?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**40. Does this sibling think your mother is / was closer to him/her or you?**

(Please choose the correct response)

Our mother is / was usually closer to me	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our mother is / was sometimes closer to me	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our mother is / was equally close to both of us	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our mother is / was sometimes closer to this sibling	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our mother is / was usually closer to this sibling	<input type="checkbox"/>

**41. Do you think your mother is / was closer to you or this sibling?**

(Please choose the correct response)

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Our mother is / was usually closer to me             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Our mother is / was sometimes closer to me           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Our mother is / was equally close to both of us      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Our mother is / was sometimes closer to this sibling | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Our mother is / was usually closer to this sibling   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Questions 42 – 45**

(Please choose the correct response)

- |   | <b>Never</b>             | <b>Rarely</b>            | <b>Occasionally</b>      | <b>Regularly</b>         |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 42. How often do you discuss important decisions with this sibling?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 43. How often does this sibling discuss important decisions with you? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 44. How often does this sibling act in superior ways to you?          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 45. How often do you act in superior ways to this sibling?            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**46. Does this sibling think your father is / was closer to him/her or you?**

(Please choose the correct response)

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Our father is / was usually closer to me             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Our father is / was sometimes closer to me           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Our father is / was equally close to both of us      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Our father is / was sometimes closer to this sibling | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Our father is / was usually closer to this sibling   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**47. Do you think your father is / was closer to you or this sibling?**

(Please choose the correct response)

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Our father is / was usually closer to me             | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Our father is / was sometimes closer to me           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Our father is / was equally close to both of us      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Our father is / was sometimes closer to this sibling | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Our father is / was usually closer to this sibling   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Questions 48 – 49**

(Please choose the correct response)

	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>A Little</b>	<b>Quite a Lot</b>
48.How much do you know about this sibling's ideas?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
49.How much does this sibling know about your ideas?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Thank you for completing this questionnaire.**